

Congolese migrant learners' language, literacy and learning in primary school in Cape Town

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Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

When children whose first or home language is a minority language begin their school careers, they are commonly taught through the medium of a majority language for varying purposes, including the requirement that they be assessed in school through the medium of a recognised national language. For immigrant children and for children of immigrants, learning through the medium of a national language is part of their assimilation in to the society they are growing up in. However, often these children are taught only in this second or foreign language, and little support is offered to help them to gain sufficient competence in that language. This research studies how Congolese migrant learners in primary school encounter language, literacy and learning in poor schools in Cape Town, with what sorts of implications for their chances of schooling success? I conducted a qualitative case study observing three Congolese learners, who are still learning to read and write: Maboko and Mabele (in grade three) and Goya (in grade two), over a period of four weeks in a low status but functioning inner-city school. I draw on a sociocultural approach to literacy as contextualised social practice. This implies that children learn language and literacy through everyday interaction, therefore language and literacy should be studied as it happens in social life. I also look at the theoretical approaches to understanding language and literacy learning, such as reading theories, emergent literacy, as well as emergent biliteracy to understand the experiences of Congolese learners in South African primary schools.

One of the main findings that emerged is that the formal language education of school is not enough to ensure literacy – perhaps changing the tutoring/teaching practices and getting more involvement from the parents or caregivers may provide the necessary structure to ensure reading success of a migrant child.

While I recognise that challenges exist and further research will need to be conducted to determine how this programme involving schools and parents should best be initiated, my paper has concluded that if these challenges can be overcome then this would prove to be the best, long-term initiative.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the following chapter, I will describe my personal interest in this research study, and its context, as well as the aim and motivation behind the study itself.

1.1 Introduction

When children whose first or home language is a minority language begin their school careers, they are commonly taught through the medium of a majority language for varying purposes, including the requirement that they be assessed in school through the medium of a recognised national language. For immigrant children and for children of immigrants, learning through the medium of a national language is part of their assimilation in to the society they are growing up in.

However, often these children are taught only in this second or foreign language, and little support is offered to help them to gain sufficient competence in that language. Given the history of language inequality in South Africa, specifically the Apartheid-era preference for some languages (English and Afrikaans) over others (Prinsloo, 2011), the current Language Policy in Education (Prinsloo, 2011) is an important guiding principle for school-level education. French is not included as a language of education in the South African national languages, even though it is spoken by many immigrants to South Africa from elsewhere in Africa, such as myself. We can therefore turn our attention to the language challenges faced and the problems encountered by the growing number of African immigrants in South Africa.

Just as schools have opened up to all South African students from a variety of racial or cultural backgrounds, they have also started to open up to immigrant children (Vandeyar & Vandeyar, 2011). As migration from other African nations becomes easier and increases in numbers, there is also an increased need for research in assessing how immigrant students experience and adjust to the South African school system, particularly with regard to how they experience the medium of instruction as well as the learning processes that draw on this language (Vandeyar & Vandeyar, 2011).

According to Walters (2008), the selection of a language of instruction in the context of students' linguistic diversity affects the way in which students are able to learn. He argues

that it influences the efficiency with which education is delivered and that it could be one of the causes of economic underdevelopment (Walters, 2008). His study demonstrates that one third of the world's population is not able to access education in their first language (Walters, 2008). While 86.42% of individuals living in developed countries are able to access education in their primary language, only 38.12% of individuals living in less developed countries have access to education in their first language (Walters, 2008: 133).

Language policies, which define the ways in which children are to be taught these second languages, do not always take background experiences, values and knowledge into consideration. When a child is not taught in her primary language during her formative years, she is more likely to drop out of school early or not attain a level of achievement similar to her peers (Walters, 2008). Learning becomes meaningful when it is linked to the child's background (Dixon-Krauss, 1996), as well as when reference is made to their own everyday language, which, in a sense, lays a foundation that aids the students' ability to learn. Many unnecessary challenges will arise for both the learner and the teacher without laying this foundation, i.e. without making the lessons taught in the classroom relevant to the lives of the learners.

This research studies how African migrant learners experience language, literacy and learning through the medium of an unfamiliar language in South Africa and uses a case study of immigrant Congolese students in a school situated in a poorer district of inner-city Cape Town. The conceptual framework for the study is provided through the resources of the social practices approach to the study of language and literacy (Gee, 2000; Prinsloo, 2005). This approach, also known as the New Literacy Studies and also as just Literacy Studies (Prinsloo and Baynham, 2013), argues that reading, writing and meaning are socially shaped activities (Gee, 2000; Torr, 2004; Prinsloo, 2005). Young children are more attuned to the practices of schooling whose parents read storybooks to and with them, ask them questions about the story, engage them in the reading process (Heath, 1983; Orella, et al., 2003; Torr, 2004) and relate text to their own experiences and respond to text or images (Torr, 2004). Those children are more likely to develop their language comprehension and expressive language skills as well as a positive attitude and the understanding of reading and writing within a standardised register at school and thus, increase their potential success in school literacy learning.

1.2 Rationale behind the Study

The South African state's constitutional processes have produced national policies which stress the importance of multilingual education (Prinsloo, 2011) in order to give everyone residing in South Africa the opportunity to study, and therefore to fulfil their basic constitutional right to education (Prinsloo, 2011). However, in South Africa, as in many parts of postcolonial Africa, English is a dominant language in the political and economic arenas, and is also a major language of globalization and cross-country trade and relations (Setati, et al., 2002). Therefore, schools are commonly oriented towards English and many African learners choose to learn in English as a result of the perception that proficiency in English is necessary for succeeding in the job market and achieving financial security. Many learners often enter an English learning system with little to no proficiency in English. This poses problems for their ability to engage with the curriculum content and unsurprisingly results in poor performance – ultimately, many learners drop out or fail exams. This is very often the reality that children who speak a non-South African first language face in South African schools.

There is a complexity to being an immigrant and being taught in a foreign language at school that is sometimes overlooked. Research regarding the diaspora of a group of people illustrates that such transnational movements result in socio-linguistic adaptations on the part of the migrant community as well as the host population whom they interact with (Vigouroux, 2011). These processes result in increases in social and linguistic diversity, where there are individuals and groups from diverse linguistic and social backgrounds living in South Africa, with learners in a single classroom having very different backgrounds and speaking different languages. In such multicultural and multilingual environments, there is no single language that can be identified as a common 'mother tongue' or 'first language' that the students share. The decisions about which language to use in such multilingual schools and classrooms, how, and for what purposes, are not only pedagogical but also political ones, as language relates to issues of power (Setati, et al., 2002). Researchers in language and literacy studies such as Heugh (1997), Gee (1999) and Prinsloo (2005) consider how language operates in society as a marker of social position and social identity. These issues of position and identity link language to political issues in any particular space. This problem has been heightened by the fact that this multilingual reality was not taken into account or did not appear to exist when educational legislation was originally decided on and it was stated that children should have a

right to be schooled in their ‘mother tongue’, as long as it was one of the eleven official languages of South Africa (De Klerk, 2002).

My own experience as a French-speaker in an English learning environment has made me curious about the way Congolese children adjust to this system, where English often becomes the dominant teaching medium. I have studied this dynamic in poor, under-resourced schools, where teachers have had limited training and face overcrowded, multilingual classrooms, inadequate learning materials and infrastructure on a daily basis. In these schools learners’ language capabilities are not necessarily taken into account within the dominant discourses of the classroom. It might be hoped that teachers can work to accommodate learners from many different language and cultural backgrounds in English-medium classes. However, in contrast Sadowski (2004) argues that teachers often lack understanding about immigrant’s linguistic and cultural backgrounds and misinterpret their inability to express themselves adequately. Instead they make uninformed judgments about deficits in these immigrant children’s cognitive development. Referencing the work of Bordieu (1977), schools reinforce existing class privileges, depreciating cultural and social capital of poor and working class student. What these children bring to school from home, namely: cultural practices, histories, and languages (capitals of knowledge) are often not valued by formal education. The curriculum does not recognise many children’s out-of-school literacy practices, and teachers seem to be reluctant to use learner’s home language (Bourdieu’s cultural capital cited in Swain& Deters, 2007:827). Their parents cannot get involved in the life of the school, which would help to provide support for them, such as attending school meetings and helping with homework. English, as the dominant medium of education, also poses barriers to non-English speaking parents’ involvement. Few of the disadvantaged learners’ everyday activities will be mediated.

I have studied whether and in what ways teachers succeed in helping migrant children – who come from a minority background and are being taught in a foreign language – to adjust and keep up with the work being covered in the classroom. Using a case-study approach and drawing on resources from classroom ethnographic-style studies, I have focused on three Congolese students’ experiences in the classrooms of a resource-poor primary school in Cape Town that I will call St Francis, in order to determine what kind of support they receive (if any) in adjusting to this English-dominant social and learning environment, both at school

and in their home environment and to learn about the quality and challenges of their early school experiences.

1.3 Background

Gaitan (1994) explains that it is often the case that immigrants and refugees move to new countries in the hope of a better economic life for their children. However, they have to deal with language barriers which present an obstacle to integration. Sadowski (2004) has noted that learners with an immigrant background are more likely to live in poverty, deprived housing conditions and fare poorly in education, culminating in their falling behind Grade level. In a study in the USA, Sadowski found that many immigrants leave their home country as refugees, for example, due to civil war. This often leaves them with post-traumatic stress disorder and related mental and emotional stress, impacting their experience at school. However, some second generation immigrants experience similar problems at school in terms of learning, language ability and differences in cultural practices and expectations, although they were born in the host country.

Apart from international migration, many African countries have been experiencing large-scale rural to urban migration as a result of socio-economic and socio-political trends in the last few years (Vandeyar & Vandeyar, 2011). Migrants from other African countries come to South Africa with hope for a better life, searching for jobs and business opportunities, health benefits and better schooling for their children. Congolese people have widely sought refuge from political instability, including wars and other crises in their home countries in recent decades, and are among the many African migrants who move to South Africa. These individuals often have linguistic repertoires comprising a command of their native mother tongue as well as an official West or East African language, such as French in the case of Congolese migrants, acquired both from colonial history and their local African cultural milieu. Difficult material living conditions and xenophobia in their new country sometimes create a common experience of disillusionment and despair among immigrants.

Statistics regarding numbers of migrants and their legal status are uncertain and their accuracy is questionable. Adegoke (cited in Janks, 2005:109) states that African foreigners in South Africa are often represented in the South African press and mainstream discourses as ‘burdens and criminals’. Furthermore, she goes on to state that thousands of them come in

‘illegally’, some obtaining citizenship fraudulently. These structural challenges exacerbate the issues of integration and language acquisition for the children of immigrants.

Below is the chart that represents the statistics regarding SADC immigrants to South Africa, 2011

SADC immigrants to South Africa, 2011

Country of origin	Right to stay&work	No right to work	Total
Angola	6 186	4 016	10 202
Botswana	7 017	45 515	52 533
DRCongo	29 106	52 293	81 399
Lesotho	79 132	317 938	397 070
Malawi	1 077	70 616	71 693
Mauritius	563	36 898	37 460
Mozambique	241 692	245 147	486 839
Namibia	163	21 419	21 582
Swaziland	14 473	103 097	117 552
Tanzania	79	5 187	5 267
Zambia	972	63 755	64 727
Zimbabwe	659 081	1 250 000	1 909 081
Total	1 039 542	2 215 863	3 255 406

Source: DNA Economics and FinMark, February 2012, piii

The statistics indicates that the Congolese people make up a significant number of the total migrant population from SADC countries – they are the fourth largest group, following those from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho. Migrants arrive from multiple parts of the Congo and generally constitute a mixed group with different reasons for migrating, like seeking better economic gains abroad or an improved standard of living – a subject briefly discussed above. As such, Congolese migrants differ in their expectations towards their host country and seek different objectives in the host country once they have migrated, depending on their reasons for moving – in this sense a refugee may find himself content with finding an improved sense of security, whereas a scholar may find himself frustrated by having to

pursue a job below his capacities – expectations are directly linked to the migrant's social background.

The multiplicity of ways in which Congolese immigrants relate to mainstream society gives language acquisition and learning additional layers of complexity. The Congolese children accompanying their migrant parents or those who are born in South Africa are a heterogeneous group. They face a dual challenge, because they have to socialise and study in a language that is different to the languages they are accustomed to, once they enter school in South Africa. Migrant children face a challenge in integrating themselves within the schooling system as they have grown up speaking a foreign language and need to learn how to cope with a new schooling system, literacy practices and cultural practices. In addition their frequent exclusion from mainstream society and the lack of integration that follows damages their ability to pick up the subtleties of mainstream culture and language.

Teachers struggle to understand how to assist such children to ensure they grasp concepts in their lessons. The language barrier arguably poses difficulties or boundaries in communication between children and teachers which requires specialist and skilled responses. Not only do teachers have to converse with local children and ensure that they understand the lessons, but they additionally need to communicate with the migrant children and their respective needs, adding to their burden of work.

1.4 Globalization and Sociolinguistic Ability

Blommaert, et. al (2005) argue that globalization has increased cultural connectivity and conflict, and as a result has augmented linguistic diversity and tension. These various tensions and conflicts need to be resolved whilst accounting for rising social and economic inequalities. The social class of migrants, their language identity and language ideologies, as well as social and cultural factors interact to form an 'immigrant problem' in the host country. Children of migrants face a dual challenge, because they have to socialise and study in a language that is different to the languages they are accustomed to once they enter school education in South Africa. As a result, the sociolinguistic orientation of the country is impacted, not solely the individuals living within the country or speaking the language.

Torr (2004) argues that different groups of children use different language patterns in the construction of knowledge and may have very different ways of taking meaning from the

environment and from language when compared with a population that speaks a dominant language. Concurrently, Sadowski (2004) agrees that cultural and linguistic diversity need to be taken into account. Teachers need to not only take into account the subject matter but also formulate a strategy that acknowledges differences.

1.5 Integration of Migrant Children in South African Schooling

Gaitan (1994) notes that immigrants often use education as a means to conform and integrate into their new country. Schools are in a position to play a key role in facilitating integration, not only because they help children to acquire important skills such as language and sensitivity towards local cultural context, but also because schools influence the integration of migrant children both within the school environment as well as outside of the school environment. Yet, according to Vandeyar and Vandeyar (2011:12) the role of schools in facilitating integration depends to a significant extent on their social values and material resources, which may undermine or strengthen a school's ability to facilitate integration of migrant learners - while some schools may be 'sympathetic' towards migrant learners, others may be 'xenophobic'. The schooling environment, attitudes such as racial prejudice and xenophobia towards migrants hinder migrants' integration into the host society. In their research studies Vandeyar and Vandeyar (2011) identified the influence of race and racism on black immigrant students, who became subjected to be identified as a homogenous body alongside indigenous black South Africans and consequently faced the same experiences in terms of racial prejudice and discrimination.

In her study, Vandeyar (2010) researched the efforts of eighteen Johannesburg teachers to facilitate the integration process. She found that while some the teachers were particularly concerned to create an inclusive classroom environment that was conducive to promoting integration, the majority were indifferent, and not open to the possibility of change. She adds that educational reforms, which set new and challenging demands for teachers, may be in conflict with their personal beliefs and values. Furthermore, xenophobic statements among government officials (at all levels) as well as among the wider population, create additional barriers for migrants when they attempt to access state services. It is unrealistic to expect migrants to integrate effectively if they feel unwelcome, or if their neighbors are not prepared to accept them. In light of these research findings, it can be said that the integration of Congolese migrants in South African schooling depends on the migrants' and local

communities' intentions on the one hand, and on the government and host society's response to migrant populations.

Integration refers to “accommodation without assimilation”, and indicates a process whereby minority groups are able to retain their language and cultural practices, while still engaging in the social and political life of the country to which they have migrated (Gibson 1988, cited by Ghaffar-Kucher, 2006). According to Ghaffar-Kucher (2006), schools tend to focus on "assisting" immigrants to assimilate, rather than seeking ways to accommodate and celebrate the diversity brought to the educational environment by immigrant learners. Baker (2006) adds that within this assimilationist model, the dominant language (e.g. English), tends to be valued above the migrant home language (which is often repressed in the classroom), negatively affecting migrant learners' ability and desire to engage with their local peers, and thus effectively silencing and isolating them in their new environment.

1.6 The Classroom understood as a Social Context

From a sociocultural perspective, Swain and Deters (2007:822) argue that “the social environment is not the context for, but rather the source of mental development” – a social environment in this sense is what the mind absorbs from its surroundings, and not the place where it does it. The basis of this view lies in the sociocultural model of cognition associated with Vygotsky (1978) and his views on the social dimensions of cognition, where social (or interpersonal/inter-mental) processes are the necessary condition for the emergence of individual psychological (or intra-mental) processes. This suggests that the classroom should serve as social context in which learners and teachers can interact in a manner that provides positive interaction.

Swain and Deters (2007: 823) argue that “individuals have histories that are complex and variable and that affect their actions and motivation to engage in second language learning”. This highlights the need for the classroom setting to create a space that is conducive for growth, through the acknowledgment of each individual learner's social context. Through providing each learner the space in which their language, culture and history is respected in the classroom, greater opportunities will be created for the learners to engage actively with their learning. Thus, within second language acquisition, classrooms that provide an

opportunity for learners to draw on their first language resources whilst learning a second language might be more appropriate in the language learning process.

The classroom is the place in which students can interact with other students on a social level. They can develop ideas and learn more about their peers' cultures, traditions and beliefs. So, in order to shape literacy experiences appropriately, teachers can understand the inequalities of certain groups in acquiring literacy, as mentioned above. Barton (2009) argues that in order for children to learn efficiently and effectively educators and researchers must create a curriculum that relates to their lives outside of school. Students must be able to incorporate aspects of their home life and social life into classroom learning. When teachers relate to students' lives outside of school, the students are much more responsive and participatory. Allowing for a flexible curriculum furthers the progress of effective learning and creative teaching (cited in Prinsloo, 2005:15, Prinsloo, 2011:8), and ultimately improves literacy. Marsh (2006) adds that teachers need courses that expand their ability to construct primary literacy curricula that challenge the established, dominant literacy practices in schools and address complex literacy issues. Specifically in South Africa, so much emphasis is placed on the changing and enhancement of the curriculum, that the proper training of the teachers is often overlooked and pushed aside. Qualified teachers are essential to learning. Having an effective curriculum is not sufficient without the proper teaching of an informed educated instructor. In many South African classrooms, one may find several languages spoken by the students, with English being their second language. Teachers could be able to take this into account, and could be able to establish an effective pace at which to present material, and an effective way in which to present material clearly.

Children can be supported and understood through a flexible curriculum and classroom activities (Prinsloo and Stein, 2004; Stein and Mamabolo, 2005). A flexible curriculum allows children the space needed to ask questions and progress at their own pace, rather than that of the top achievers. It proposes a re-articulation towards a bottom-up approach that accommodates the different needs of children, thus, enabling students to ask questions and to work together, giving more freedom to learners. The teaching of one kind of literacy might privilege certain groups, while disempowering others whose language and social practices do not relate to school literacy (Prinsloo, 2005), and ultimately improves literacy. Such observation and adaptation of teaching styles can help to bridge the gap for students who do not come from a household where the dominant language is spoken.

Janks (2004:33) argues that through merely providing individuals with access to the hegemonic language, the cycle of dominance of such language is perpetuated. It may therefore be argued that schooling is one type of institution that maintains dominant literacies. By teaching a specific sort of literacy, certain groups might be privileged and others disempowered, such as migrant children who have not been exposed significantly before school to the prevailing literacy. Having said this, Janks (2004:33) goes on to say that, if access to the dominant language is restricted, individuals are further marginalised as they cannot partake in the socio-economic and political discourse that is enabled through that language. In other words, by not teaching learners the dominant literacy practices, the system could potentially exclude them from the larger society.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) argue that because people use different literacies in different domains of their life, home being the primary domain and school the secondary (Gee, 1996), learners' primary literacy is valuable, but often marginalised during formal education (cited in Prinsloo, 2011:3).

For the purposes of this study, two concepts must be defined: primary and secondary discourses. "Discourse is language use relative to social, political and cultural formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals' interaction with society" (Fairclough, 1999: 3). Primary discourse refers to the learner's home language register and practices while secondary discourse refers to the learner's school language register and practices. Gee (1996) argues that teaching and learning should enable both mainstream and non-mainstream children, and give them the ability to analyse and critique primary and secondary discourses, as well as dominant discourses, effectively. But what shape such interventions might take in the local setting is what needs to be considered on the basis of grounded research. Before we can do this, we need to understand people's conception of learning in a foreign language. In setting out my own research intentions, therefore, I start with my own research question.

1.7 Research question

How do Congolese migrant learners in primary school encounter language literacy and learning in poor schools in Cape Town, with what sorts of implications for their chances of schooling success?

1.8 Objectives

- To examine the academic activities of Congolese migrant learners in a poor primary school in Cape Town in areas of literacy and language.
- To gain an understanding of how particular Congolese migrant learners in a poor primary school in Cape Town experience language, literacy and learning.
- To learn about these children's attitudes towards the learning of the language of instruction.
- To consider the consequences of monolingual instruction for children to whom the language of instruction is not a language that they know well.
- To explore the effects of language concerns on these immigrant children's school performance and achievement.

1.9 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how Congolese learners, as one specific group of students who are struggling in the education system, experience a transition into a monolingual English medium system and how that impacts their chances for successful study. This study also seeks to determine what teachers are currently doing to help immigrant learners adjust and keep up with the standard of other learners. I am interested in what support programs they run to help better facilitate the immigrant children in this transition period. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a more efficient and inclusive teaching system that empowers all students and not a select few who are proficient in English.

Given that the role of the school and teachers is vital to ensure that the learners are supported with regards to their identities and development as bilingual speakers, I aim to produce research that will provide better understanding of immigrant children's experiences under the current conditions in schools.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework and the literature review that support this research. The theoretical framework for my study focuses in particular on two theoretical traditions that provide resources for the study of aspects of minority language children's second language acquisition experiences. These are the socio-cultural and learner-identity approaches to the study of language learning, as I explain below. A social practice view believes that what is important about language is how it is used and that different language practices can be linked to cultural and societal values in different ways. Children learn language and literacy through everyday interaction, therefore language and literacy should be studied as it happens in social life. The literature below focuses on socio-cultural tradition, which also encompasses learner identity approaches.

2.1.1 Literacy as variable social practice

According to sociocultural theory, language and literacy practices are culturally situated (Gee, 1990). Children learn language through interactions with the older members of their community, particularly with those who care for them. These language interactions are determined by the particular cultural practices that shape them and language learning therefore consists of socially constructed understandings and knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Reyes, 2006:269). This approach to literacy is espoused by researchers within the fields of cultural anthropology, socio-psychology, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, who study how people use literacy in everyday life and educational contexts (Heath, 1983; Street, 1983; Gee, 1996; Prinsloo, 2005).

According to Gee (1996) literacy is not only a skill, but a practice influenced by sociocultural context. What he calls New Literacy Studies (NLS) therefore holds that language should be treated as social practices instead of simply technical skills taught in formal education. Gee (2000) suggests that reading and writing will only make sense when learnt in the sociocultural contexts where they are practiced. Language and literacy therefore have to be studied as they happen in social life with consideration of what different concepts mean to different cultural groups, hence this study's references to the importance of family life and the

home environment. According to Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000:1), literacy refers to literacy practices that have social, cultural and political contexts. A literary practice is the specific term that is used to refer to the ways that reading and writing is used in a broader cultural context (Barton 2007).

Street's (1984) research challenged the concept that literacy is a set of skills, isolated from contexts of use, rather different communities use literacy in different ways. In his study in Iran in the 1970s Street noticed the multiplicity and complexity of literacy activity, including reading and writing in the traditional 'Quoranic' schools as well as the new state schools. Moreover, he saw reading and writing by people who were buying and selling fruit to urban markets. Each of these was distinct practices, varying in their scripts, language and social purpose. These ranges of literacy practices were not recognised by central government or outside agencies (like development agencies), yet each was indeed a form of literacy which helped village people, seen from outside as illiterate, to complete their daily activities of different kinds.

Street's description of literacy refers to literacy practices that have social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are rooted (Street, 1984). Street found that literacy is context-specific and is therefore not value neutral. Within certain circles there are varying perceptions of what constitutes literacy. Literacy is used in many parts of our lives. It can shape who we are and how we interact with the world around us.

Street (1984) argued that the view of writing as an autonomous and uniform skill, based on one's cognitive processes, contrasted with his view of literacy as an ideological practice, varying according to how literacy is used in society. Street (1984; 2005; 2009) believes that "literacy" refers to literacy practices that have social, cultural and political contexts and should be studied with this in mind. It takes on many complex forms and is important to understand. Literacy practices are what people do with literacy.

Drawing on the critique of the autonomous model outlined by Street, Prinsloo and Stein (2004: 68) argue that early schooling in South Africa largely draws on what they identify as behaviourist constructs in literacy education, such as the notion that learners should be taught reading and writing skills by learning a series of hierarchically organised per formative and recognition skills, concerned with the coding and decoding of letters. Additionally, Gee

(1990:150) reasons that the problem in primary literacy education is not “learning how to read” but more of addressing how young learners do or do not attain precise social practices, social languages and genres that include written words in a home environment, the schooling systems and in the public domain.

To understand literacy as a social practice one needs to examine how it is used by human agents in historical, political and cultural contexts. Thus, literacy cannot be seen as unchanging across cultures and communities. Literacy practices vary across communities and thus are dependent on interactions in a given social setting (Heath, 1983, 2001).

In the 1970s, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) studied the ways in which three different communities in one American town used language and literacy in the way they raised their children and used and produced text. Heath (1983) questioned why Black students were failing in the recently desegregated schools, and she contrasted their language and literacy socialisation in community settings with children of White mill-workers in a neighbouring community as well as with middle-class children in the same town. She found that reading and writing happened in all three communities but that local communities had varying histories and different rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge and opinions (cited in Prinsloo, 2011:1). Heath compared a black working class community, Trackton, with a white working-class community, Roadville and a mixed middle-class community, Maintown (Heath, 1983: 28 – 29). Heath (1983) contrasted each community’s local “ways with words” with the expectations and rules for text-linked activities in the formal institutional setting of schools. She argued that the ways of meaning of socially positioned individuals were not the same across communities and that middle-class children were advantaged by the closeness to school ways of their home and community ways with language.

Each community’s way of taking from print and using knowledge was seen to be interdependent with the way children learn to talk in their social interactions with their caregivers. In some communities the ways of learning in schools are very similar to the ways taught at home; in other communities the ways of school are simply an addition to the home-taught ways and may be in conflict with them (Heath, 1983). This illustrates the ways in which literacy and learning practices from the home environment may ultimately have positive or negative effects when it comes to learning literacy in school. In contrast to

Trackton and Roadville, Heath found that the community in Maintown ensured that their children were well prepared for school because of the compatibilities between their home ways of knowing and taking meaning from print with school ways (Heath, 1983: 236). The three communities of children responded differently to the methods of taking knowledge from books.

For the purpose of this study, aspects of Trackton and Roadville students' struggles with school literacy can be seen with regard to Congolese children whose home language and literacy environment does not match that of schools. Heath (1983, 2001) argues that different groups of children use different language patterns in the construction of knowledge and may have very different ways of taking meaning from the environment and from language when compared with a population that speaks a dominant language. Therefore, children from different communities respond differently at reading stages in school, because of different learning methods, when taking meaning from books. This illustrates the ways in which literacy and learning practices from the home environment may have an impact on the ability to navigate school successfully. If children have been taught outside of school in a way which is different to established teaching practices and 'ways with words', they may struggle when faced with the language and literacy taught in schools. From analysing the Roadville and Trackton students, we can see that having knowledge of learning types and socio-cultural conditions allows schools to modify their curriculum to teach children from varying backgrounds, who bring different orientations and resources to their learning at school.

The cultural practices that children become familiar with as they grow up are, in fact, 'ways of taking' meaning. Gee (cited in Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009:9) argues that people act according to "models" they learn to use in social activity. Bourdieu (1991) explains that, through their habitus, which refers to the background knowledge, experience and values of a child, the fact that children have personal histories, memories, and practices at home may limit or enable them in some way as children bring much of their own ideas to the meaning of the texts they encounter in school. This habitus make it difficult to adapt to a new system, particularly at school, as their habitus seems so normal to them (see Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009:9). Bourdieu's theory (1977) is essentially an exclusion theory, or a theory about the reproduction of social hierarchy: children whose cultural practices are those of a social minority, who are from working-class or migrant families, on average, fail in the school system due to it being specifically designed to exclude the resources that they hold. Schools

reinforce higher class backgrounds and depreciate cultural practices of lower class students. Additionally, Bourdieu states that values and outlooks of children from a lower class background ‘clash’ with those of the schools; schools are ‘foreign cultural environments’ for these children.

Prinsloo & Baynham (2008:5) argue that “the study of local literacy needs to engage with how the ‘local’ is constituted in relation to the flows and ‘travelling cultures’ of globalisation”. In other words, we need to understand literacy in a global and international context before we can adapt it to our own local context and environment.

2.1.2. Learner-identity

Norton (1995) argues that the social identities of language learners are multifaceted, a site of struggle, and are subject to change. Norton and McKinney (2011) say that learning a powerful language such as English can cause one’s identity to change for the better and allow one to gain more power. They go on to say that in reality, when learning a new language, the learner does not switch identities; he or she reshapes the existing one, adapting to the target language (Norton and McKinney, 2011). Language can be used to create new positions and challenge old ones (Janks, 2010). Thus, it can be said that language, as well as identity, are dynamic, and one can have more than one identity in the same way that one can speak various languages.

Usually, second-language learning happens in a context where the learners are of a minority (i.e. immigrants are surrounded by speakers of the target language). The learner’s historical and social context can be considered in language acquisition and also how learners accept and resist the diverse positions that these contexts offer them (Swain and Deters, 2007). They go on to say to say that it is necessary to examine the learning circumstances, and the mastery of practices within communities. There is therefore a need to account for the practice of language in the community, in learning a language at school.

Language and culture are linked (Prinsloo, 2011), and thus, in order to solve the problem and give migrant children the support needed to gain confidence in their second language and their ability as students, Norton (1995) argues that the new language must be linked to the existing culture. By making the existing identity relevant in connection to the new language,

you create new associations. In this way, schools can enable learners to find their voice and to use classroom learning combined with positive social identity.

Looking at the challenges that Congolese migrants experience - one can consider the linguistic and literacy resources these children bring with them to school to understand how well they would adapt to the school they are in.

As for Congolese migrants, most of them originate from the eastern part of Congo (DRC), as this is region affected mostly by long-lasting successions of conflicts. These migrants often speak a local language, such as Swahili or Lingala, with a large share also being able to speak French. Other migrant children migrating to South Africa might speak Portuguese, such as migrants from Angola or Mozambique, Shona or Ndebele, such as migrants from Zimbabwe.

2.2 Reading theories

The use of various different strategies helps us read in different ways. An example of this would be how we read magazines, newspapers, the dictionary, novels, academic articles all in different ways (Goodman, 1984). Without the ability to read, students cannot be expected to progress through schooling as it plays an integral role in knowledge development. This is a major issue in South Africa due to the fact that the majority of books are written in English. The majority of migrant students do not speak English as a first language and thus struggle to understand and develop in the language.

Jackson (2000) proposed two processing theories which discuss the manner in which words or text are broken up and processed in order to develop understanding. The first of these two processes; Bottom-up processing which is predominantly in the initial stages of learning how to read, states that mastery of reading skills begins with awareness of speech sounds and letters and continuing through comprehension (Moats, 2007). The word is broken up into letters and sounds units through letter recognition and the combination of these. Learners see a letter and immediately allocate a particular sound to it. This pedagogy of developing the capability to read is only sufficient in the initial stages of learning as older students have already developed these reading skills. Many researchers have started to show that “phonemic awareness is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the development of decoding and reading” (Pearson, 2004:225). Phonics first, fast and simple’ was advocated by phonics-centered approaches, according to Pearson (2004:226). Freebody and Luke (1990:9)

argue that “rudimentary knowledge of the alphabet, letter-sounds relationships, left to right directionality, and so on, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for using literacy for particular social functions and uses in actual contexts”. Prinsloo (2005) argues that classroom literacy teaching practices that emphasise skills-drills result in a greatly constrained form of literacy. Phonics instruction’s overemphasis on the sounds and symbols of language has a notable downside; learners are introduced to language in a way removed from any meaningful context.

The second of the two approaches - top-down processing - entails drawing on existing knowledge and experiences to make meaning, predict meaning and check predictions as read. This process is predominantly reader-driven (Jackson, 2000). Goodman (1984) adds that reading is about the understanding of the text. By incorporating these two processes, it is proposed that a more effective way of teaching learners to read can be formed (Jackson, 2000; Goodman, 1984). This approach is based on an awareness of the importance of not teaching phonics in isolation, but the creation of an orientation of learning ‘with meaning’ (Pearson, 2004:226).

Freebody and Luke (1990:10) argue that “since reading and writing are nothing if not social, then being a successful reader is being able to participate in those activities in which written text plays a central part”: It is important to take the view that classroom instruction in reading is not just a matter of transmitting the skills of decoding or the process of comprehension, but is as well a display to students of what counts as reading in the here and now of the classroom and what reading more generally is thus about.

Freebody and Luke (1990:11) highlight that, when looking at text analysis, one focuses on both decoding and meaning of the text. We look at how one participates and engages with the text. The author and the reader bring differences to the text and thus readers draw related but differing readings of the same text, depending what they bring to their reading. Prinsloo (2005: 14) explains that learning to read involves learning the social context of language and how it is used in relation to other ideas influenced by the situations in which people live and grow. A learner who learns to read in an unfamiliar language needs to be supported in terms of how to make sense in that language.

2.2.1 Emergent literacy

The approach to literacy as emergent supports the view that literacy development starts long before formal childhood instruction (Prinsloo, 2005). From this perspective, literacy is no longer seen simply as a skill to be learnt in formal education but as a social and cultural practice which is learnt through a gradual process which begins early in a child's life, long before they start formal schooling. Therefore, a child's development of language and literacy processes is influenced by parents and reflects the cultural background in which they are raised (Prinsloo, 2005, Heath, 2001). "This emergent perspective is based on the premise that children bring sense-making strategies to literacy events and actively make sense of their worlds" (Prinsloo, 2005:9).

Parents' reading to babies and young children has a strong impact on children's language and literacy development and can provide children with a solid foundation for school literacy learning (Prinsloo, 2005; Torr, 2004; Heath, 2001). Children learn literacy through active engagement with books and materials for school literacy growth, such as games, and reconstruct their knowledge by rereading favourite books and by using invented spelling (Torr, 2004). Dyson (cited in Reyes, 2006:270) agrees that "children learn and develop their own 'theories' and 'concepts' about language and literacy from an early age. This knowledge emerges through their active social participation in everyday activities with family and community members, and in institutional settings such as the pre-school. It is through active participation and observations of print and writing in their environments that children are able to develop their knowledge about how, what, and why they write".

Children who have had many experiences with storybook reading are able to identify many of the alphabet letters and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words, which precede tying those sounds to letters (Moats, 2007). This prepares children for later reading instruction. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to provide meaningful opportunities and appropriate materials that elicit active engagement from learners in the learning process. The perspective supports child-centeredness versus teacher instruction (Dantas, 1998).

The emergent literacy approach breaks with the idea that 'reading readiness' can only be acquired in a school setting and in a sequential manner. Prinsloo (2005:10) argues that "an emergent literacy perspective stretches the process of literacy development to include budding literacy-like behaviours (e.g. pretend reading) as legitimate and contributory, and

treats social contexts as important venues for exposing children to literacy knowledge and practices”.

The work of Marie Clay acknowledges that children are already familiar with ideas of reading and writing before they enter the classroom for the first time (Prinsloo, 2005). Based on Heath’s work (1983, 2001) the culture children acquire as they grow up is highly influential on their ways of ‘taking meaning’. Children who enter school with English as a primary language spoken at home are less likely to experience reading problems compared to those who are not accustomed to English as a first language (Torr, 2004; Prinsloo, 2012). However, many schools in Africa are still greatly influenced by the way of conceptualising early literacy preparation in behaviourist terms, as ‘reading readiness’, with an emphasis on such concerns as preparation in visual processing, eye movements and eye-hand coordination, letter shape recognition, gross-motor and fine-motor skill development and the like, to the detriment of the making of meaning activities (Prinsloo, 2005).

In contrast, an emergent literacy approach argues that, with the assistance and guidance of their more advanced peers (classmates, friends, siblings) and adults around them (parents, grandparents, teachers), children get practice in their ‘zones of proximal development’, allowing them to achieve through their social relationships higher levels of understanding about written symbols and print in their environment (Prinsloo, 2005). (The zone of proximal development in the work of Vygotsky refers to a child’s potential to learn and expand their knowledge assisted by a teacher or a knowledgeable peer, or through play activity on their own or with others, when such learnings are just beyond their present sphere of competence (Lysaker, et al., 2010). Children construct knowledge within a socially mediated cultural context (Heath, 1983, 2001).

Prinsloo (2005:10) argues that most arguments for an emergent literacy approach come from environments that are literacy-rich and which “reflect child-centred, progressive education concerns of English-language educators in those more affluent settings”. Such approaches place importance on the reading-related behaviours of parents and the reading resources they are able to provide in the home, along with the role of socioeconomic background in shaping literacy practices. However, in African settings, the effects of poverty along with hierarchical views of what children are and how they should be taught make learner-centred approaches difficult to apply sometimes.

2.2.2 Emergent Biliteracy

Biliteracy refers to children who are taught in a language that they do not use at home (Reyes, 2006). According to Reyes, et.al (2008) gaining literacy knowledge in one language does not preclude it from being transplanted into another language – as long as these two languages do not differ in terms of their alphabetic system. In their view, whether this transmission happens from the first to the second language or the other way around is not significant. Cummins (2006: 68) agrees that literacy involves an inherent cognitive/academic skill which is essentially common for and transferrable between all languages. In other words, the inherent cognitive/academic skill which allows for the literacy of one language can be reproduced or transferred to the literacy of another.

According to Cummins (2008) a child's second language competence partly depends on the level of competence already achieved in his or her first language. It takes more or less three years for a child to become proficient in everyday conversational language (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) while academic proficiency (Communicative Academic Language Proficiency) will take longer, from four to seven years.

According to Paxton (2009), learning comes easily when it is done in one's mother tongue, but when learning through a foreign language, such as English, one first needs to learn the language before being able to understand the concepts one will be required to learn. Prinsloo (2005:13) argues that "if children and adults encounter literacy without also developing the resources to make and take particular meaning from the activities of reading and writing, then they are receiving very little". Therefore, Probyn (2009) suggests that, in order to help improve communication and understanding of content, teachers who share a common home language with the learners often make use of the code switching approach, which involves the explanation of a concept using the mother tongue of the learner. However, this practice is widely viewed by teachers in South African schools as illegitimate, as many teachers feel guilty about "smuggling in the vernacular", or that it can lead to rote learning, wherein understanding of the concept is minimal (Probyn, 2009). Counter to this view, Setati et al (2002) argue that code-switching, as pedagogic strategies, will not only be based on what policy says but also on teachers' ability to discern what could be in their students' interests. Thus, although it is not favoured by many educators as an effective classroom strategy (Probyn 2009, Setati et al. 2002), code-switching is seen as a means of providing students

with the opportunities to communicate and as a means of enhancing students' understanding in multilingual classroom interaction, as it can enable one to make meaning clear and to support students' learning in an efficient way (Probyn, 2009). Without the use of it, some students such as Congolese learners' alternative ideas would remain limited.

In addition, Bunyi (2001) goes further by stating that children need not struggle with the English language, but should instead be provided with lessons in their own vernacular. In light of this, Edelsky (1991) suggests that every student, in order for them to perform well in academic settings, needs to get familiar with the world of academic practice and have a certain level of cognitive development, as well as a certain degree of language development. Instead of placing all the emphasis on the mother tongue related issues, cognitive development of the students should be promoted to enhance their all-round performance.

2.2.3 Curriculum and Assessment Policy statement (CAPs) English First Additional Language Grades 1-3

After 1994, the education system of South Africa was faced with the inevitability of change as a result of the political past of the country. The whole education system was to be affected by this change, from national policies, subject curricula, to classroom teaching and learning. Almost twenty years of work and major renovation of the curriculum and language in education policies has resulted in considerably less change and improvement than was hoped for and language in school has continued to be a problem. Language is pivotal in the academic performance of learners. Once it becomes a barrier, it impacts negatively and hinders their performance and progress in reading and writing skills. To address the difference between education policy and educational practice in South African schools with regards to the use of language, The First Additional Language CAPs takes into consideration the socio-cultural context of the learner, to better understand how one can effectively acquire the new language (DoE, 2011). CAPs considers all the learning areas. For example, in the language learning area, the specified outcomes includes; listening, speaking, reading and viewing, writing, thinking and reasoning, language use and structure, along with a strategy of 'additive bilingualism' – the developing of a strong literacy foundation in a home language and the building of 'first additional language' literacy onto this. In this regard, the curriculum aspires to promoting knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives (DoE, 2011:8).

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I investigated the socio-cultural and learner-identity approaches that provide resources for the study of children from a minority language background's second language acquisition experiences. The literature above focuses on socio-cultural tradition, which also encompasses learner identity approaches. A social practice view believes that what is important about language is how it is used and that different language practices can be linked to cultural and societal values in different ways. Children learn language and literacy through everyday interaction, therefore language and literacy should be studied as it happens in social life. I also looked at the theoretical approaches to understanding language and literacy learning, such as reading theories, emergent literacy, as well as emergent biliteracy. I then briefly outlined the CAPs English First Additional Language Grades 1-3. The next chapter describes the research design and methodology I have used in this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the research design, orientation, methods and techniques I have used to gather and analyse data for this study. It will also include a discussion of the ethical factors which were taken into account in the planning and carrying out of the research.

3.2 Research design and methodology

The study deploys a qualitative, case study approach that draws on ethnographic traditions for studying language literacy and learning and draws on discourse analysis resources for examining data.

Lillis and McKinney (2003) define ‘ethnography’ as a study of real events, in a specific social context. As a method of social research, ethnography is an invaluable means of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural nature of literacy in educational and home settings (Rampton, et.al, 2004:2). As Hymes explains, “ethnographers spend time observing and participating in the environments they seek to describe, and use a range of more and less systematic data-collection techniques to record what goes on” (cited in Rampton, et.al, 2004:2). So as to avoid imposing personal opinion and preconception onto an existing research setting. To learn about the social context, ethnography requires the researcher to spend a period of time in a research field. Street (1984) argued for the importance of ethnography in understanding literacy as a social practice and examine how it is used by human agents in historical, political and cultural contexts, because literacy is context-specific and is not value-neutral.

Heath’s studies (1983, 1982/2001) have been very important in that they highlight the advantages of an ethnographic when analysing literacy practices. It allows descriptions of the ways different social groups draw knowledge from the world around them. Heath argues that an ethnographic approach is appropriate because literacy means different things to different people and takes different shapes in different contexts and cultures. The way a child is raised and taught literacy affects how they succeed or fail with their literacy practices at school. Finally, she concludes that families give value and meanings to the language and literacy they use and teach their children.

This qualitative approach allows us to gain an in-depth understand of learning events as they occur for a small group of immigrant learners. Qualitative research is most useful in providing insight into motivations that underlie actions (Eliyahu, 2013). Through it we can establish semi-theories that can be substantiated by quantitative research. However, this method has a limited scope of ‘generalisability’ (Punch, 2005). It can be difficult to translate qualitative research into statistical data as the links between generalised data and the more subjective information (reasons, opinions and motivations) of ethnographic research are not always easily aligned. Quantitative research can be conducted more extensively over a large sample and generalizations made about the overall population group by highlighting recurrent trends. Nevertheless, quantitative research may pose problems in that the data may not pick up new phenomenon. It makes more sense to study the qualitative aspects of language and literacy events, so as to better understand the underlying causes of how and why learning occurs, or doesn’t occur. Such an approach better allows for theory-building research whereas quantitative research is perhaps more suited to theory-testing research.

Finally, as Rampton, et. al (2004:2) point out, ethnographic analysis works with ‘sensitising’ concepts “suggesting directions along which to look” rather than with ‘definitive’ constructs “providing prescriptions of what to see”. When conducting observation, researchers should be open-minded and flexible. Reality in the fieldwork may differ from theory and consequently change the course of the research.

3.3. Methods and Techniques of data collection

Data was collected via classroom observations and interviews with learners, teachers, parents, and the school principal, which were recorded both through written notes and through audio recordings. Classroom observations allowed me to witness the real learning events in the context in which they naturally occur. Interviews provided useful in-depth insight into the experiences of Congolese learners.

3.4 Case Study

According to Creswell (2007:73), case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a case or multiple cases over time. Through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (for example, observation, interviews, tape recorder, etc.) case studies emphasise detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of

events and their relationships. In case studies, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.

I have chosen to use a case study method because it aligns with the socio-cultural and learner-identity approaches to the study of language learning, which view literacy as situated within social contexts and not isolated from contexts of use. In doing so, all the real life details can be observed, such as how the teachers use language and literacy knowledge to facilitate instruction and how migrant learners respond to such teaching approaches. Detailed descriptions of the classroom context help me to better understand and present the experiences of the migrant children from the Congo with language and literacy learning in the classroom context. Though case study research does not necessarily answer a question definitively, it allows for elaboration and theoretical construction with regard to a subject.

I conducted a qualitative case study observing three Congolese learners, who are still learning to read and write: Maboko and Mabele (in grade three) and Goya (in grade two), over a period of four weeks at St Francis Primary School, a ‘poor school’ (or fifth quintile school) in Cape Town¹. I draw on a sociocultural approach to study literacy as contextualised social practice and to make sense of the children’s experience with language and literacy learning. This period (Grades One to Three) represents a formative stage in a child’s school life, commonly referred to as the “foundation phase”, implying that this period of learning forms a base on which all further learning, and chances for successful learning, will be built. Understanding the dynamics of learning at this early stage presumably provide a basis for understanding what the dynamics are in cases where learners are struggling.

Migrant children are at a disadvantage when starting school due to the fact that their home language is not English. The medium used in South African schools is predominantly English, but also includes Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu or other designated languages at Foundation Phase elsewhere at particular schools, which means these children often have to try to overcome a steep language barrier. On top of having to learn a new language and its intricacies, these children have to learn school subjects which are taught through this unfamiliar language. In turn, this difficulty can translate into a stunting of their ability to read and write efficiently. To understand Congolese children’s experience with language and

¹ I use pseudonyms here, not their actual names, nor the name of the school.

learning literacy I focused not only on the language of the classrooms but also on how teachers actively engaged with those children in their lessons. Learners' success at school no doubt depends substantially on the teaching and classroom practices of the school.

3.5 Classroom Observation

To gain a better understanding of the classroom culture and the challenges experienced by the Congolese learners throughout the process of classroom engagements, including any incongruities between what participants reported and what took place in practice, I spent five hours each day from eight o'clock to one o'clock over a period of four weeks, during which time I observed each lesson during that school day, ranging from English to Mathematics. Learning is understood to entail how learners participate in the classroom and how they can do it better. Because all classes were conducted in English, studying how learners coped with different subjects made it possible to verify whether similar literacy problems were to be observed across them or not. By focusing on classroom activity involving all of the school subjects I was able to analyse how the children experienced learning in this 'poorer school' environment, where my focus was on both their language and literacy development. I also observed the content of teacher talk and the nature of the tasks and activities set by the teachers to encourage learner talk in order to help facilitate their learning during the lesson. I paid particular attention to events where questions were asked during class and the manner in which the teachers reacted to the learners' responses, particular when learners responded with answers that were incorrect. I observed whether migrant children understood the kind of classroom interaction (i.e. teacher-learners interaction) and activities during the lesson, and I tried to work out the reason why they understood or did not. Did the child who understood a particular term or concept get support from siblings (e.g. from a big brother in a more senior class), or did they get extra classes from which they benefitted, or was there some other explanation? I also paid attention to the instructor's methods of dealing with the language disparities and whether the children experienced language immersion or the learners were given the opportunity of interacting in class discussion in their non-English home-language. Observations of how the teaching and learning process occurred were done by me as the researcher from the back of each grade classroom. I only walked around the classroom when the learners were engaged in individual and group activities. The data gathered through this process will be analysed, interpreted and presented in the chapters that follow.

3.6 Field Notes

During my observation, I made use of field notes by writing the date, the activity and detailed notes of the lesson and audio recordings which later helped me to analyse the language use in depth. I collected some examples of worksheets completed and learners' work. I also gathered the writing sample of learners' written work.

3.7 Interviews

The second research method, that of interviews was intended to confirm observational data as well as to fill in gaps. Firstly, observation alone may not yield as comprehensive an understanding of learners' experiences as is required – some children are not as outspoken as others in a class full of their peers, and eliciting their experiences may require a more private approach. Secondly, a more direct interaction with learners may help of learners' experiences and challenges. In the interviews I also investigated the combination of factors contributing to individual learners' success or struggles in the classroom, which may involve support structures external to the school to determine whether learners are experiencing complete language immersion, which is highly beneficial to their learning of the school language and whether there are opportunities to learn and practice language skills at home. All my recorded classroom data were transcribed and thus became the raw data for later analysis

3.8 Data analysis

I made use of the observations from the literacy events that took place in the poor school for purposes of analysis. Barton (2007) suggests that literacy events and literacy practices are the two primary constructs to use when analysing the social participation of learners concerning literacy. Barton (2007) describes a literacy event as an occasion in which a written document is essential to how learners are able to understand the lesson content and interact in the classroom. Furthermore, Barton and Hamilton (2000) define events as observable periods which derive from activities and are influenced by them. The focus on literacy events helps point to the greater social context in which these events are situated. This social context provides the concept of literacy practices, which refer to identifiable or routinised ways in which literacy events take place in that setting, for example, the writing of an essay or a comprehension exercise in an English class, or a report in a science class. Hence, I also described the social and interactive environment in which these events occur

(Barton, 2007). To gain a sense of the experiences of Congolese learners with language, literacy learning in a poor South African school, I have used the socio-cultural and learner-identity approaches to the study of language learning to analyse my data.

To conclude here, my data was made up of various sources which included my fieldwork observations made from notes in the field and lesson extracts, transcripts from recordings and writing samples. I transcribed each of the recordings as part of my initial data processing. I tried as far as possible to transcribe all detail in the recordings and this meant going back and forth at times to listen to something I may not have heard correctly. I completed a final check by reading my transcript against the recordings and listening for anything that did not match. I have drawn on this data as in my analysis and presented parts of it as evidence for my claims.

3.9 Description of the School

St Francis Primary School is a low status but functioning (as opposed to some dysfunctional schools that can be observed around greater Cape Town) inner-city school. Previously a church-run school founded by Catholic nuns, it is now a school co-funded by the state, still with a strong Catholic identity but taught by lay teachers. It is an English-medium speaking school. In interview, the principal informed me that the school is culturally diverse with 382 learners from different backgrounds. Sixty per cent of the children currently attending the school don't have English as a first language and about 28 per cent of those children are refugees that come from various northern African countries. Approximately 45 per cent of the parents qualify to be exempted from paying fees (excluding the resources facility fee) (Interview, school principal, 27/02/2014). For those who cannot afford to bring food to school- there is a kitchen facility where food is served during First Break and at lunch-time. The school gets additional funding from the church and donors. Fees vary every year. In 2014, Grades 1 to 7 paid R275 for education classes per month and R280 for resource facilities per month. Pre-grade R and Grade R class costs for day-care classes are R385 per month, with resources facilities of R280 per month. Fees are payable monthly, Grades 1 to 7 for a period of eleven months and pre-grade R and grade R for a period of ten months.

The school draws most of its pupils from the surrounding neighbourhood, where the majority of the residents are lower middle class. In a later interview, the school principal informed me

that the majority of the children come from working class families who are struggling financially. The school has twelve qualified teachers plus one learning support teacher and two teaching assistants. It has twelve well-furnished classes, including educational materials (such as posters with various pictures of shapes, letters of the alphabets, numbers and number names, counting charts, etc.). The school also has an equipped computer room and library which greatly facilitates learning.

The school has a comfortable staff room and tea room where teachers regularly relax. The classroom has between 38-50 students per teacher and a teacher assistant. The school has extra classes every week for those children who struggle academically. There are NGO's (e.g. Compassion club) who come in to assist with one-on-one reading tutorials, and also paired reading and shared reading for those children who have language difficulties.

3.10 Ethical issues: Access to the School

I submitted a written statement on the ethics of my planned research, jointly signed with my supervisor for ethics clearance to the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Education at the University of Cape Town and received clearance for the research. I also received permission from the Western Cape Education Department to carry out the research at the school, and received the permission of the school principal to go ahead with the research. To gain better access to the field and make a thorough plan for how to proceed with my research, I made contact with the participants (learners, parents, and school) to inform them about the nature and purpose of my research before formal research commenced in February 2014. Before starting with my fieldwork, I obtained the signed consent of parents and teachers to observe and interview their children, and got the children's agreement as well. However, I was still nervous about not disrupting the school's programme in any way. For purposes of anonymizing my sources of data, pseudonyms are used when referring to the participants of this study as well as to the school.

3.11 Conclusion

I have explained the research design, methodology and research methods used to gather data in the form of observations and interviews. I have given my research timeline to show where and how I interviewed the subjects in my study. I have also outlined the implications of the

study. The next two chapters presents and analyses my data, by way of the analytic resources of the social practices approach to the study of language and literacy learning upon which this study is built. I will then conclude my study in chapter six.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussions

4. 1. Presentation of ethnographic data

In this chapter I will present my observations and analysis, based on data that focuses on three Congolese migrant learners. I will show how these three learners have experienced communication, literacy and learning in English, and how each of them has coped or struggled to cope. I will look at one learner whom I see as adjusting well to English learning, one who struggles to some degree and one who experiences great difficulty. I will do this so as to examine the impact of the environmental factors as well as the individual factors that contribute to language and literacy acquisition. In so doing, I hope to show that, with appropriate support, a child can still improve their language and literacy skills even if their language background differs from the language of the school. This argument drives my analysis of the data: that with parental support and the quality of instruction by passionate and understanding teachers, learners might still overcome the many difficulties they face in conditions of second language instruction. I will analyse how the teachers explore learners' ideas and help them to understand lesson content, in order to support their language development across the curriculum.

Again, this analysis will possibly reveal the overarching importance of support during classroom activities. Specifically, I will look at socio-linguistic interactions during lessons and activities, as the classroom is the site of crucial language and literacy exchanges wherein we can gauge the competence of both teachers and students alike. I will analyse how the teacher mediates the children's learning by looking at the use of question-and-answer sequences to test knowledge and guide content understanding through the use of English.

This analysis will attempt to reveal the significance of the teacher's role in literacy by way of their use of lesson delivery and techniques of instruction, as teachers' teaching and classroom practices are crucial factors in learners' failures and achievements. I will introduce the learners then analyse my findings in terms of the socio-cultural and learner-identity approaches to the study of language learning. The description of 'Parent Education' programme at St Francis will also form part of the discussion. Finally I will draw the implications from the analysis and outline areas for further study.

4.1.1 Maboko

The first case study is of an 8-year-old girl whom I call Maboko. She is able to use the English that she learns in school to assist her mother in translating important SMS messages from English to Lingala that her mother receives from her employer. She has above average capabilities with English language, literacy, and learning more generally. This, as shall be evidenced, is due to the fact that her mother has demonstrated a keen willingness in the home environment to engage her daughter in extra-curricular learning through communications technology. My analysis will show that this home-learning environment has a profound impact on the development of literacy in Maboko, and that this could be applied to all children facing factors which have been considered especially disadvantageous, such as poverty, limited formal education of the parents, instruction in a foreign language, and so forth. This home-learning has a two-way advantage for them in that both mother and daughter are involved in a practical exchange involving home and second language use. In the interview with Maboko's mother, she indicated that she is a single parent who works as a painter in central Cape Town for only R2 800, 00 a month. Due to her mother's low income, the school waived Maboko's school fees. As Maboko's mother describes:

...I'm a single mother... I can't manage with ...eh... I got a problem with ee financially... um. ...Maboko, she's not paying now, She's studying for free because I told them I can't pay now because my salary is little... and I showed them everything even the pay slip I showed them... now is only the small one who, she's paying now R645 fees now... Maboko is out Only my small boy who pays. (... indicates pause or hesitation)

This waiver of fees has allowed Maboko to attend a school with greater educational resources compared to poorer public schools in the wider Cape Town area.

Maboko comes from a non-English speaking family as well as from a single-parent, low-income household. Although her mother has been in South Africa for ten years, she speaks broken English and has difficulties when it comes to writing in English. Maboko, in helping her mother respond to the SMS messages, has enabled her to maintain her employment. The following is a quote from Maboko's mother explaining how her daughter is now able to teach her how to communicate and read English.

...I'm just helping her ... how to read a book because... I can see now since she's starting ehe um learning in this school... she's... can do more even at home.... She is always busy with the books, um ... even the time to eat she is always busy with the books....So I'm happy now because I was helping her with my bad English now she is the one who... she's teaching me now the right English... Even I'm busy with my cell phone writing a message sometimes I can miss the word I can just call her ...come can you help me ... how I can spell white ee right she can spell to me correctly aah.... So I'm so happy about that now.

Engaging young children in literacy activities at home is one way for parents and other family members to stimulate literacy in the home environment. Through such activities, parents, family members, and related community members may contribute to the education of children while also serving to empower their own adult education, thus working towards a simultaneous reduction of adult illiteracy. Reese et al. (2010) argue that, since parents may function as vehicles for change in early intervention strategies, it is particularly important that they be included in attempts to encourage children's language development. Of course, for such shared parent-child literacy interactions to occur in the first place, children and parents from diverse backgrounds, such as migrants must have access to books and other reading materials available that align with their language and cultural context.

The empirical reality of this idea is brought to the fore by one of the teachers at St Francis:

It always works when parents and school work together...with homework, parents can reinforce the words they're learning. Parents can be uncooperative, [...] But the more help from home they get, the better. The parent and school need to work together [...]

Despite the fact that English is not prevalent in Maboko's home, she is still excelling in her studies. On her last written exam in Math and English literacy, Maboko received a grade of eighteen out of twenty, and during my classroom observations Maboko was an active participant in many of the classroom lessons. For example, she is able to respond to her teacher asking questions and is able to provide information beyond what the question requires. I have shown just one instance of this in the extract below:

1. Teacher: ...well you will be able to see what the story is all about just by looking at the picture... um what do you think the name of the story is?
2. Class: Ostrich (choral response)
3. Teacher: ... This story is all about an ostrich.... Yeah [*points to a Congolese learner*] Wendy ... what do we call a person who writes a book?

4. Class1 (Maboko): An author
5. Teacher: Alright, [*choosing a learner*] Rezzy ... can you tell me who the author of this book is? ... Look at the cover.... [Me me raising hands]
6. Class 6 (Talia): ee ostrich has very big wings and eyes...
7. Teacher: good ostrich can see very far... but, [*choosing a learner*] Maboko how fast can ostrich run?
8. Class7 (Maboko): They can run very fast... but... they can't fly.
9. Teacher: very good. Maboko , tell us how big is Ostrich's egg? ...And how many people can eat Ostrich's egg?
10. Class 8 (Fiona): very big

In the above extract from a classroom lesson, Maboko engages in learning through active participation. The teacher is soliciting a response about a book from the students and calls on Maboko for answers twice. Maboko is always quick and accurate in her responses and engages with the classroom materials, such as the set book. This has not only developed her oral language skills but has also built her self-confidence. This is apparent in her demeanour when asked to respond to materials in the classroom and through the way that speaks English.

Maboko generally reads with her mother at home, as indicated in the extract of the interview with her mother, seen above. Maboko's mother has received training from the school on how to read to and with children, and is thus able to promote good reading habits at home.

While there are many factors that influence a child's outcomes, such as social class, income, living conditions and parents' own education levels, the factor that clearly has the largest influence, in Maboko's case and possibly many others, besides that of the school is that of the home learning-environment. While parents may have come from disadvantaged socio-economic settings, very positive outcomes may still be achieved if they take an active role in stimulating their child and engaging in language and literacy practices where-ever possible. This is especially important for these parents who have not had the advantage of a wealthy background, or high levels of formal education. In a high-income family, learners may be supported by tutors, additional readings, or many other routes to enhanced education that additional income may afford. In a lower income household, active involvement of the parents in the child's education may often be viewed as a last-resort route, taken only by those who can't afford the luxurious options available to higher income households. This is, however, not the case; the intellectual stimulation that can arise from parents actively involving themselves in their child's education can potentially have greater impact than any

outside aid that money may buy. As Reese et al. (2010) show in their studies, parental involvement in their child's literacy practices positively affects children's academic performance and is a more powerful force for academic success.

4.1.2 Mabele

Our second case study is of an 8-year-old boy who I call Mabele. In their annual assessment, Mabele was tested by the NGO active at the school which is dedicated to improving literacy at primary school level. He was found to need extra help with his reading. When Mabele was asked to read a similar text to the one read to him by a compassion facilitator, it took him over five minutes to struggle through a short passage and, by the time he had finished it, he did not know what he had read. Mabele demonstrated little understanding of the text as he was unable to answer more than five out of ten comprehension-based questions about the text. The quote below shows how a facilitator describes Mabele's reading skills:

... He doesn't seem to make the connection aah (laugh) between letters and the word. He's actually not making very fast progress. He can write the very simple word but he's in Grade Three now he should be moving faster than he is. So we'll keep on working with him on it and keep on doing what we can do.

To help Mabele cope with his reading difficulties, a trained volunteer from the Compassion Club sits with him and gives him personal attention, in the form of one-on-one, paired, and shared reading for one hour, twice a week. This will continue for the rest of the year, 2014 since he had just started receiving the intervention, as indicated by the facilitator.

The following is an example of how a volunteer provides support and facilitates Mabele's reading ability in English:

1. Facilitator: Mabele d' you speak French... yes, so you can talk French to Joe here?
2. Mabele : yes, but I don't know I don't know my French anymore.
3. Facilitator: you don't know your French anymore okay ... how long have been you in Ca... in South Africa... you've been here for long time, haven't you? How old were you when you came here were you a baba?
4. Mabele : I was I was... 5 years old
5. Facilitator: and you are ...how old are you now?
6. Mabele : I am 8 I'm, I'm almost 9
7. Facilitator: yes, his English is good... that's why the one on one is so important... we hear the English and we can easily give support if need be...

8. Facilitator: We're gonna play a game Mabele and I okay you can join us if you want to, if you're clever enough to join us in the game, oh no I'm teasing you he's being very fascinated about your recorder, recording device.
9. Joel: ahaahh (laugh) and what is the aim of this game?
10. Facilitator: the aim of the game, the aim of this game okay are you listening Mabele because you're gonna do it it's fine....the aim of the game is you're going to listen to the word I'm gonna say the word you're gonna listening carefully to the word and you're gonna think about what the last sound in the word is, okay we're going to do it together with you and you're gonna do it here and we're gonna see if you can write it down okay...this is here it's mum because he's got a baba on her back so this is mum, what is the last sound?
11. Mabele : m:::
12. Facilitator: that's it well done...what about this one hat what's the last sound for hat
13. Mabele : t:::
14. Facilitator: there we go...but what about hymn
15. Mabele : m:::
16. Facilitator: there we go, beautiful you're fast now ... and this is the difficult one? ...That's going to the left and that's going to the right what's the last sound for off
17. Mabele : f:::
18. Facilitator: eh very good...okay that's pretty clever that's pretty clever ... can you write mum for me?
19. Mabele : mum m:::
20. Facilitator: well done that's it, it's what you have to do, can you write your friend's name? Underneath that and what's the last sound in your name, how do you say that?
21. Mabele : faith th:::
22. Facilitator: that's it... what else can you write?
23. Mabele : bird
24. Facilitator: oh you know how to write bird... you can do bird that's right you know how to write bird well done you ... and what's the last sound for bird
25. Mabele : d:::
26. Facilitator : how can you write ... d::: dog is going to start with a d::: how can do dog and
27. Mabele : g:::
28. Facilitator: then d::: for dad
29. Mabele : d:::
30. Facilitator: and how about cat?
31. Mabele : t:::
32. Facilitator: this is dad and this is cat they look pretty similar don't you see? They look much the same [the point is to get the last sound in the word here's the first sound and the last sound of the word] do you think we can do another game? Let see if we can do another game...you can play this thing.
33. Facilitator: Joe, you'll keep coming to see how we making progress.

In this passage Mabele is taught the letters of the alphabet and the sounds connected to those letters. He learns through educational games designed to encourage learning by making it fun; and learns to recognise the sound of the letters in a word and to write the letters down. His spoken English is described by the facilitator as “good” in line 7, because he seemed comfortable with basic conversational English. Mabele, however, still needs to learn the academic English language from the textbooks and the meaning of new words that are not part of his oral vocabulary.

The facilitator focuses on phonic drills, teaching individual sounds and how they combine to make words with significant value placed on neatness and proper pronunciation without getting Mabele to understand the words and how to use them. This shows that the school thinks that reading is mainly about decoding symbols and less about understanding written language and using it in meaning making activity. It can therefore be argued that the type of literacy activities that Mabele is being exposed to does not prepare him for school reading nor for everyday reading and writing activities.

A sociocultural approach to literacy learning claims that children’s literacy practices are shaped by their environment. Children learn to read largely through “literacy experiences” and through exposure to books and texts. The facilitator can take into account that children interpret the same environment differently (Heath 1983). Children make connections between texts and their own experiences, enabling them to recognise and make ideas in literature (Torr, 2004). Gee (2000) suggests that reading and writing will only make sense when learnt in the sociocultural contexts they are practiced. Language and literacy therefore have to be studied as they happen in social life with consideration of what different concepts mean to different cultural groups.

Teaching literacy in a multilingual school does not only require taking into account the subject matter but also a strategy that acknowledges differences. The social practices surrounding the concept of literacy differ across groups of people and situations, to the extent that the terms ‘literacy’, ‘reading’, and ‘writing’ mean different things (Barton, 2007). Literacy in different socio- cultural groups must include how the groups work with and interact with these texts.

The type of literacy activity that Mabele is being exposed to is mainly about decoding symbols and less about understanding written language and using it in everyday life. Because reading activities are not focused on meaning-making they are likely to be void of any lasting effect. Classroom teaching literacy practices that emphasise skills-drills practices result in a greatly constrained form of literacy (Prinsloo, 2005).

Mabele is being taught to read and write as if it were simply a coding activity independent of the context and meaning of what he is writing. Society, however, expects literacy to be quite the contrary, where it is the meaning and substance which is the emphasis of writing. Therefore, the style of teaching used by the facilitator in this passage can be seen as being in conflict with what Mabele's society would state the underlying aims of literacy education ought to be. So, in order to shape Mabele's literacy experiences appropriately, the facilitator (teacher) needs to understand the inequalities of certain groups in acquiring literacy, such as Mabele. The teaching of one kind of literacy might privilege certain groups, while disempowering others whose language and social practices do not relate to school literacy such as Mabele. If a child has been taught incorrectly outside of school or in a way which is contradictory to established teaching styles, they may struggle when faced with a different system of literacy taught in schools. Therefore, it is important that these potential differences be taken into account when teaching children outside of the formal school system such as Mabele.

Phonics and decoding are important for teachers to know, as these are tools used to teach children to read. However, teachers can also focus on the purposes and meanings of texts by reading these children novels. This will potentially show children the value and purpose of reading and motivate them to learn further. The teacher can start with basic cognitive blocks and then build on these and engage children actively. In order to implement such a process, teachers would have to be trained on how to use these tools to advantage children.

To improve his reading skills Mabele does not only need to understand phonics rules but also to practice reading on regular basis. Teaching must be carefully integrated with acquisition in order for learning to be beneficial. Early language and literacy can be learned better by being surrounded by the language and by talking to others in the language instead of just reading and writing it. Literacy (reading and writing) is not just focused on skills, but is rather a meaningful act in which the participants (readers and writers) should be viewed subjectively

and active socially. According to Gee (1990:540) 'learning to read is always learning some aspect of some discourse'. Writing contains a particular viewpoint, which means that it belongs to a particular discourse. It is impossible to read outside a discourse; one cannot read in a vacuum.

Mabele's background is a clear indication that he needs some special attention so as to be able to meet up with others. It can be seen that Mabele struggles to make connection between letters and words, said the facilitator. His home language environment (primary discourse of learners), is not related to the language used at school (secondary discourse). Exposure to the English language is more or less completely limited to the school context. Therefore, the facilitator/teacher carries the responsibility to model and encourage English in the classroom for establishing fluency in English while he is teaching his subject. This shows that Mabele is still uncertain or unfamiliar with the required task and thus, needs support.

Developing Mabele's literacy skills is a complex process. Parental involvement with reading activities at home is said to have significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills, but also on children's interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Reese et.al, 2010). Reading should not be regarded as being related only to formal education but rather as a social practice. Using the social context is a valuable approach to ensuring migrant learners' literacy development. The children's emergent understanding of how to approach and represent ideas in reading or writing is socially constructed and supported by the adults and expert writers around them (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Reyes, 2006:269).

Furthermore, phonics and decoding are important for teachers to know, as these are tools used to teach children to read. However, teachers or facilitators can also focus on the purposes and meanings of texts by reading these children novels. Teachers can provide a literacy rich environment for their students (Mabele) and combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Studies from the sociocultural perspective have investigated how social context or environmental conditions support or influence the development of reading and writing process. This will potentially show Mabele the value and purpose of reading and motivate him to learn further.

4.1.3 Goya

The third case study is of a 7 year old girl whom I will call Goya. This case study is different from the last two cases discussed. Goya has experienced a decisive and unsettling break in her schooling. She arrived two weeks after the start of the South African school year directly from the Congo where she was in the middle of her school year there. This was a shift from a Grade Two French-speaking class in the Congo, to a Grade Two English-speaking class in South Africa. This, understandably, has led to Goya struggling with language, and particularly with reading. She is the only one among five Congolese learners in the class struggling to express herself orally in English.

When I asked Goya if she understood when the teacher talked, she replied to me in French, *“Quelque fois j’ai difficile à l’entendre parler parcequ’elle parle si vite”* (Sometimes I can’t follow the teacher as she is speaking too fast). I then asked Goya, what she does, when she does not understand what the teacher is saying. She replied, *“J’observe et fais ce que font les amis”* (I watch everyone else and do what they do).

Goya finds it difficult to understand her teacher and as a result struggles to keep up with the teacher’s instructions; she relies on watching her fellow classmates to work out how to complete the task. She looks at the other children to understand what the teacher’s instruction is. For example, she understands when the teacher tells the class that they must pack away their books and that it is break time by watching everyone else pack away their books. Goya understands that it is time for break rather than understanding the actual instruction that was given. She does, however, recognise commonly used phrases and what they imply, such as keep quiet, stand up, yes, well, no, etc.

When I asked Goya why she is so silent in class, she replied that she feels at ease communicating with peers outside the classroom but she is uncomfortable communicating with the teacher with limited English as she is afraid of making mistakes. She feels like she should speak fluently before approaching the teacher.

In the extract below from the classroom observation, she is passive and silent and cannot participate in the classroom talk. To get her to talk, the teacher asks her questions while asking the class to be understanding with her because she is new:

1. T: no people say do you have R1 because R1 and 100c is exactly the same thing...we said... you don't talk about 100c you talk about R1 that's when you go over cents to R1 when you reach 100c... okay R1 is exactly the same as 100c except you say R1 you don't say 100c okay you understand? You understand? Please....Sh:.... [silence] ...Let me see who's not concentratingI see some children talking ee they're playing [*talking to the learners*]... right R55 – R7 = Who's gonna help me to do this one R55 – R7= I just want to see... remember that Goya (from Congo) is new I just want to see if Goya knows this if she doesn't know this it's because she's new R55 – R7 = but Goya you may know ...let me know what must I do?
2. C12 (Goya): mm...eh... [Remains standing and very quiet]
3. T: [*turns around and addresses the next learner*] Pam... why don't you help Goya ... Goya, Why don't you ask Pam...tell her you don't not understand ... ask her to explain to you what to do... alright till Goya tells us what to do...
4. C12 (Goya): put one number in your head [*after getting the answer from her neighbour*]
5. T: yeh [*addresses the same learner*] Goya ... which one do I put in my head...? Bigger or the smaller one?
6. C12 (Goya): the bigger one
7. T: [*Showing the two numbers*] Goya...which one is big this one or this one?
8. C12 (Goya): 55
9. T: 55, is bigger yes... everyone put R55 in your head, the bigger number and the small number R7 on your fingers so it's a minus sign...[*Points to nearest learner*] Michelle... are we going to get more or less?

The language of teaching and learning here is English, but Goya is a French home language speaker and has had very little exposure to English. In line 2, this extract shows that at first she cannot answer the teacher's question and she looks confused. However, the teacher does not give up and helps her construct the answer by asking questions and by getting input from her peer in line 3. Goya is then able to answer in English with the right answer in line 6. It could be argued that Goya is simply repeating what she has heard Pam her peer say as she does not seem to understand the principle of subtraction. Goya is unlikely to succeed in completing the activity independently. In line 7, Goya gains confidence in speaking English as the teacher continues to encourage her to speak and think for herself. There is a language

barrier, but if the teacher perseveres with this method of pairing a weaker learner with a stronger learner, it may overcome the barrier to learning and learning can still take place. This is one of the strategies the school uses to support learners who are struggling academically.

Understanding language acquisition is central to improving the overall learning prospects of migrant learners (such as Goya) being taught in English while they are still in the process of learning the English language. Not allowing a non-English speaking child to use her or his home language and not using multilingual instruction in the classroom creates difficult circumstances for such children as they do not receive support in understanding the language of the classroom. This results in learner's becoming reduced to silence as they cannot fully express themselves in the language of instruction (in this case, English). The example of Goya illustrates the misunderstandings that a language barrier could present, resulting in Goya being misunderstood and possibly discriminated against due to preconceived notions that may present themselves.

Learners' inherent linguistic resources and literacy could be used as foundation for learning because learning becomes more meaningful when it is based on background cultural knowledge and connections to everyday contexts. Thus, the teacher could still give support to the children who are struggling with language and literacy learning but it is essential to take into account the relevant context of the child when doing so. The fact that different children attend school with different experiences of how to act during literacy events will influence their beliefs about the nature of literacy. As a result, some of them will understand the language practices being taught as in line with their own beliefs, and others will not. This can be a useful approach in order to ensure migrant learner's language and literacy development. Teaching can aim to be structured in a way which develops a framework which supports the student's independence to work in English.

Below is a quote from the teacher describing how she helps Goya feel more confident about her English in the classroom:

I always make sure they understand...sometime I invite them to participate by trying to get them to talk sometime I try to correct them in a non-embarrassing way... e.g. I reinforce the language by repeating a word or sentence and ask them to repeat the correct sentence after me. I sometime explain to the class that it is

difficult for them because they don't know the language... "Ask someone to help you to find the answer"... Make their classmates understand their situation.... I keep the language as simple as possible. I use body language, peer help, even place a tentative learner next to them to help them and to make sure they don't go off track and try to be patient yeah yeah.

In devising their instruction, teachers can foreground the student and the social context of the learner's environment in order to provide specific support to cater for the needs of the individual learner. Frameworks used by the teacher might include strategies which encourage the individual language learner towards speaking the language independently and allowing more class time to be devoted to the speaking of the language i.e. the "practice makes perfect" approach. In this framework, the role of the teacher is to direct the student, perhaps using tools and supplementary materials, such as images, class discussion, narration, and so forth, so as to encourage the student towards using the language. Emphasis can be placed on sustained use of the language so as to discourage fear of making language mistakes. It is necessary for teachers to make reading and writing English fun and relatable so that they have greater motivation to be committed to reading and writing English.

Additionally, in the interview, the teacher informed me that she stays behind after school every Monday and Tuesday for extra English and Maths lessons with Goya and this was confirmed by Goya when talking with her. Thus, Goya receives individual mentoring from her teacher. The teacher keeps things as simple as possible by using easy words for Goya to understand. Goya's teacher states,

...there is improvement because when Goya came in here she couldn't ...she didn't even know the sound she didn't know how to write her name, but now she knows the sounds of alphabets and she's trying very hard with her reading so she's improving slowly but surely but she's always listening and she's always trying her best.

In the interview with the principal, he indicates that the school employs a number of other strategies to assist the learners. For example, the school conducts workshops with parents to help them continue developing their children's literacy and comprehension at home. To make sense of how the school empowers learners' parents, I participated in one of these workshops. The following section will describe this workshop, and the interviews that I conducted with some of the participating parents, with a focus on how they viewed the programme.

4.2. Parent Education programme (workshop)

The school has found the workshop programme helpful in improving the outcomes of students who struggle with their schooling. In the programme, the school has workshops for seven consecutive weeks attended by the parents of struggling students. The workshops empower parents to be more effective in their children's learning process and to assist their students at home. The workshops are held on Saturdays, lasting two and a half hours from 9 o'clock until about 11.30. The workshop I attended was facilitated by a Grade three teacher who has twenty seven years of teaching experience, assisted by two other teachers. The principal introduced me to the parents and briefly reminded them of their responsibility for their children's education. To enable parents to decode words when reading with their children at home, this particular workshop featured a lesson on sounds and letters. Each letter of the alphabet was taught as a sound. The passage below is an example of this in the lesson:

T: we're going to use these sounds to make words
[The teacher writes on the board the *a* and *t* letter] and asks the class
T: What sound is this? [Pointing to *a*]
P1: *a*
T: and how about this? [Pointing to *t*]
P2: *t*
T: when we put these two sounds together, we read it?
P: we say *at*. [Choral response]
T: what if we add another sound in front of the *at*, for example *c*, *c – at =*
cat
T: What sound do you hear first?
P3: *c*
T: What sound do you hear in the middle?
P4: *a*
T: What sound do you hear last?
P5: *t*
T: Now tell me what word do you hear? *c – a – t*
P5: *cat*
T: so *cat* it's a new word we are making from the combination of *c* and *at*.
So every time we put a new sound in front of *at* we're making a new
word so what about [teacher writes the following words on the
board] *cat; sat, fat, mat; rat; bat*
T: I want you to sound each word and then you must read the word.

This passage shows that even within the workshops, the school places more focus on phonic drills, and teaching individual sounds and how they combine into words. This indicates that the school thinks that reading is mainly about decoding symbols and less about understanding

written language and using it in everyday life. However, a social practice view believes that what is important about language/literacy is how it is used and that different language/literacy practices can be linked to cultural and societal values in different ways (Prinsloo, 2011). Children learn language and literacy through everyday interaction, therefore language and literacy should be studied as it happens in social life. Heath (1983); Torr, (2004); Prinsloo, (2005) argue that parents' reading to babies and young children has a strong impact on children's language and literacy development and can provide children with a solid foundation for school literacy learning. Prinsloo (2005) adds that many activities involving parents and children can help to develop reading and writing ability. For example, children observing their parents reading and, writing as well as parents providing learning materials for their children to draw and write on, the number of books in the home (adult and child), and literary activities at home, or as well as parents taking their children to the library, or to the museum or to the zoo, all work towards creating a nurturing environment for literacy to be shaped outside of school. One issue to keep in mind here might be that if the parents themselves are relatively poor in, or unconfident with language, the children may suffer as a result.

It became apparent after interviewing parents within the workshop, that parents found the workshops to be very helpful. They commented that taking part in the workshop enabled them to effectively assist their children back home with their own reading. This assisted in creating a culture and environment of reading in their homes. Certain parents after the workshop reported that they were speaking English back home to their children on a continued basis. With this in mind it is important to note that taking part in workshops is not a quick fix when it comes to learning the English language. Just like any other skill, it takes time, effort and determination to master the language.

In the interview with a parent who attended the workshop, she found it beneficial in helping her child with homework:

My name is Limbo, I am a mother of two... my son Noki is doing grade 1 here at this school. so I'm here to learn because it's a well workshop programme so I'm here to learn for my child because my son sometimes he struggles in English because English is not his first language...so I decide to come here so that I can at least have something to go about when he gets homework and stuff. So I get most of the experience here how to teach my child the language,

how to teach my child... how to behave also at home... the discipline, the routine everything.

In the extract below, the interview illustrated how a Congolese parent has adopted English at home in order to assist their child in coping at school:

Ok, regarding the language, so eh ...for me I'm trying oh no I'm not trying. I speak to my children in English so to avoid any problems at school because the school here they... they speak in English they don't speak in French... I got two children in St Francis. The boy, my son is in Grade 3 and my daughter is in Grade 1. The two they perform very well at school they don't have any problems with the language because we speak English with them at home. The one who had a problem is now in Grade 8 when I came to South Africa I was talking to him in English ooh sorry in French you see. And later on G3 ooh in Grade 1 and G2 he started stuttering you see. So I say to myself no ...maybe he's confused getting two languages he's confused now. Yeah I must talk to the speech therapist now he's getting help and he's performing well now.

From the interview above it is clear that parents ought to be more involved in their children's acquisition of literacy and empowered to be more effective in their children's learning process. In doing so, one can narrow the gap between advantaged and less advantaged children.

4.3 Implications

1. In a multilingual school, it can be helpful that the school recognise the linguistic and literacy resources that children bring with them to school and use them as foundation. These resources have the potential to assist in the learning of a new language, but only if given the full support of the educators involved. This then gives children the opportunity and ability to undertake language learning and build confidence and give these learners a voice from their first encounters of English.
2. Teaching can take place in a context that is compatible with the culture of the learners or at least recognise the differences. Teachers need to understand the inequalities of certain groups in acquiring literacy as they need to be supported and understood, through the

curriculum and classroom activities. The teaching of one kind of literacy might privilege certain groups, while disempowering others whose language and social practices do not relate to school literacy.

3. It is of the essence for the school to consider how to help parents improve their children's language and literacy learning.

4.4 Conclusion

All three of the learners are migrants from the Republic Democratic of Congo (DRC). They are in the same age group and they attend the same school. Below follows a comparison of their situations:

Maboko is an eight year old girl. She was born in South Africa; she grew up in an English speaking environment. She has been attending school since grade 0. Her mother attended an education program workshop organised by the school in order to assist the learner with her school work. She is coping well in language and literacy learning.

Mabele is an eight year old boy. He was born in DRC; he migrated to South Africa with his family when he was 5 years old. He started attending school in grade 1. His conversational language skills are good but he struggles with literacy, he is slow in reading. According to his teacher, he should be reading and writing faster. The reason why he struggles could be linked to the fact that he does not take school seriously and he loses concentration easily. It seems as if he needs more exposure to the academic English language and support with readings when at home.

Goya is a girl seven years of age and has migrated from DRC this year. She started school two weeks late and she is in grade 2. She struggles because she has no previous English language experience but she is living in an environment where she has a high exposure to the English language. She is shy to speak English in class to her teacher because she has a fear of making a mistake. She is not living with her parents (she lives with her uncle) and the English language is still new to her. She is eager to learn and she is well motivated. She is taking extra lessons in maths and English literacy twice a week. According to her teacher, she is improving and progressing well.

From the direct comparison between the three learners above, it is clear that they differ in their language proficiency because of the learning abilities of each individual, as well as the exposure and support they get from the home environment. Maboko, who has been given appropriate support and prolonged exposure, has improved her language and literacy skills despite her language background differing to some extent from the language of the school. Mabele is struggling, and is not receiving the same level of support as Maboko is, nor has he had as much exposure to the language of his schooling. Comparing these two cases indicates a correlation between literacy ability and the support provided to the child, as well as exposure to the language in question. Goya's situation may maintain this correlation, as she is showing an improvement in literacy levels and is getting extra support, as stated by her teacher. Thus it is suggested by these individual cases that an increase in support at home and on the part of individual teachers can improve a learner's literacy levels and language proficiency in spite of their having to learn in a language foreign to their family.

Learning to read and write is one of the most important skills for school-based learning in society, and is strongly related to opportunities for academic and professional success. Children's success in literacy in school depends largely on the socio-cultural backgrounds they bring with them when they begin school. Despite that these socio-cultural backgrounds factors are influential they do not completely determine a child's ultimate outcome and great improvements can be made. If a teacher is highly skilled, competent, and passionate about their pupils, she/he can assist learners in overcoming literacy difficulties that have been created by a lack of informal teaching in the home environment and encourage students' own personal agency. Thus, children with a weak exposure to literacy prior to their formal education in school and those who are still adjusting to education in another language can be lifted up in their abilities if the quality of teaching is very high. This argument places emphasis on teacher training so that children from diverse backgrounds such as migrant learners can be given relatively equal chances at success. In order for learning to enable all children, privileged and disadvantaged (migrant learners), teaching can occur in a context that recognises difference and is compatible with the culture of the learners. Therefore, support for children from minority cultures such as migrant children can be important when developing and conducting curriculum and classroom activities (Prinsloo. 2005)

Chapter 5 Migrant children succeeding and failing in school

In this chapter I will engage further with my findings in relation to the theoretical framework previously outlined in Chapter two. In so doing, I will examine the points of contrast between the literature I have developed for this study and the case study itself on the experiences of some Congolese children with language and literacy learning at a Cape Town school. One of the main findings is that the formal language education of school is not enough to ensure literacy – perhaps changing the tutoring/teaching practices and getting more involvement from the parents or caregivers may provide the necessary structure to ensure reading success of a migrant child.

A central argument of the literature taken into consideration for the purposes of this thesis concerns the notion that socio cultural processes play a vital role in children's learning and cognitive development. Language and literacy skills are socially situated, i.e. they are shaped and found in social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). That is, children are strongly influenced by their social environment - if they receive continued and qualitative support from someone knowledgeable, this will be reflected in their application of language and literacy capacities. Within the social constructivist account, children are no longer portrayed as merely 'receiving' literacy and language skills. Instead, they are actively acquiring it and apply it in a unique way that is their own.

I refer to the third individual in my case study, Goya, who has undertaken her education in English without having previous access to the language prior to her immigration to South Africa at age seven. As an English-speaking medium school, St Francis does not take into consideration learners' home language. Furthering this struggle, St Francis neglects to take into account the cultures of its learners, and struggles to value the different ways societies learn, such as through story-telling and rituals. By neglecting this, the students' development is restricted, and when returning home, there is little help offered to the child, making it particularly difficult for migrant children who are cut off from everyday life practices to further their education and development. Goya struggles academically because of this lack of exposure to English. However, she has demonstrated competence in the language in social spheres of her life, for example, among friends and at play.

School is one type of institution that maintains literacies. By learning a specific sort of literacy at school, certain groups might be privileged and others disempowered, such as immigrant children who have not been exposed extensively to the prevailing literacy. Alternately, by not teaching learners in the dominant literacy, the system could potentially exclude them from the larger society. Ultimately, in order for Congolese migrant children to learn efficiently and effectively, they must be able to incorporate aspects of their home life and social life in a classroom environment. Teachers can then recognise the different resources that those young children already possess, and thus allow them to make use of them in order to learn new repertoires of literate practices (Reyes, 2006). This can be done without using it to limit learners' potential. This creates an opportunity for learners to engage with their first language whilst learning a second language (English) and this would be considered more relevant and effective in the language learning process. When teachers relate to student's lives outside of school, the students are much more responsive and participatory (Barton, 2009).

Given that learning is an active process, one cannot make sense of something they are reading unless they have background knowledge. The classroom is a place in which students can interact with other students on a social and intellectual level. In that environment, they can develop ideas and learn more about their peers' cultures, traditions and beliefs. Learning must enable both mainstream and non-mainstream children, and give them the ability to analyse and critique primary and secondary discourses (Gee, 1996). Teachers can achieve this by exposing children to different discourses, and by being aware that learning is the best method of enabling children. Barton and Hamilton (2000) argue that people use different literacies in different domains of their life, home being the primary domain and school the secondary. Therefore if their primary language is different to that used at school, i.e. the secondary language, they are at a disadvantage. Learners' primary literacy is valuable, but often marginalised during formal education.

Language and cultural practices are linked, and thus, in order to solve the problem and give migrant children the support needed to gain confidence in their English and their ability as students, the new language (English) must be linked to the prevalent social practices in that setting as well as the children's own interests and identity work. In this way, schools can enable migrant learners to find their voice and to use classroom learning combined with positive social identity.

When learning a new language through a schooling system, learners are not sufficiently exposed to the way in which the new language is used in school or in everyday contexts; as schools emphasise grammar, vocabulary and other formal aspects of the language, such as pronunciation, they neglect to stress the importance of the communicative aspects of language and literacy. For migrant children, such as Goya, who do not speak the same language at school and in their home environment, the acquisition of language at school can be a challenge because of its lack of connection to what they are used to. There is therefore a need to account for the practice of language in the community, in learning a language at school. The school can think about how language is learnt outside of school and integrate that into their teaching. Everyday uses of a language can be learnt through experience, because languages are always changing in informal settings and are shaped by conversations within different environments. Teachers can use an understanding of the implications of these socio-cultural differences to bridge cultural gaps between home and school, thereby assisting the child to grasp concepts by themselves. This difference between social and formal acquisition accounts for Goya's social proficiency in English while she may struggle in the classroom.

Rather than occurring simply during school hours, or at particular ages, education is a lifelong process that takes place constantly during one's life. In developing formal education skills, it is vital to acknowledge this continuum of learning and work to improve the factors which may help or hinder children in the growth of their education.

My own research shows that Mabele is being exposed to phonics instructions to learn to read. The problem with phonics, as I have discussed, is that children tend to focus more on how to sound out words than on the meaning of the word. However, when reading it is important to understand the text. Children make links between texts and their own experiences enabling them to identify and generate themes in literature (Torr, 2004). This is supported by Gee (1990) who argues that "there is no such thing as 'reading' and 'writing', only reading and writing something". Phonics and decoding are important for teachers to know, as these are tools used to teach children to read. However, teachers can also focus on the purposes and meanings of texts by reading these children novels. This will potentially show them the value and purpose of reading and motivate them to learn further. The teacher can start with basic cognitive blocks and then build on these and engage children actively. In order to implement such a process, teachers would have to be trained on how to use these tools to advantage children.

Some believe that using a combination of both sides of the approaches to teach reading, phonics- whole language is the best approach depending on the needs of the child. One can say that it is short sighted to only focus on one approach to teaching reading as both approaches have beneficial elements. For example, the phonics school of thought is valuable as it helps children with decoding, spelling and how to combine sound and letter to form a word. The whole language school of thought is useful as it teaches that children need to read with comprehension and understanding. These elements can be combined to create an effective approach to teaching reading. In order to improve his reading ability, Mabele does not only need to understand phonics rules but also needs to practice reading. Early language and literacy can be learned better by being surrounded by the language and by talking to others in the language instead of just reading and writing it. This is not an overnight's work; it requires practice on a regular basis.

Teachers can grow a child's love for books and reading by encouraging them to read their favorite storybooks in a permanent and meaningful way. When children are actively engaged with interesting and meaningful reading and writing experiences, they build on literacy skills early in their lives. This provides an advantage because school practices tend to focus on teaching decoding skills rather than how to draw meaning from the text or how literacy will be meaningful in their lives. Those children are more likely to develop their language comprehension and expressive language skills as well as a positive attitude towards the understanding of the reading and writing. Thus, this increases their potential for success in learning to become more advanced in their literary skills. Teaching literacy in the classroom that emphasise skills-drills practices results in a greatly constrained form of literacy (Prinsloo, 2004). Shaping a child's literacy requires modelling and the discussion of readings, and providing support is essential. The whole language approach uses meaningful reading to make it easier for learners to understand what is being read.

While reading storybooks can often be very beneficial for the development of literacy in the home, parents often do not engage their children further by asking them questions that test the understanding of the child. This can lead to a gap between home literacy and school literacy, and lower levels of success in learning to read at school can be the result of this. This shows that reading storybooks alone is not enough to have an effect on a child's school achievement.

Without relating reading activities to the socio-cultural context of Mabele, it would make it void of any lasting effect. Given that all cultures and backgrounds have different ways of interacting and communicating with their children, it is no surprise there also needs to be diversity within the interventions for learning at home. Since no single practice exists that will encourage literacy acquisition across all backgrounds, we need to recognise the diverse practices in teaching children literacy at home. For example, a study conducted by Reese et al (2010) suggested that when conversational interventions such as talking about past events were coupled with parent engagement in low income families, children showed significant improvement in their literacy. In addition to this, they stated that book sharing is most effective in middle class families, conversational interventions are more effective in low income families, and writing interventions are most effective with older children as opposed to younger (Reese et al, 2010). However, in general, exposure to literature and learning how to make use of books in a child's everyday life, at home as well as in school, is what is most effective in improving their literacy (Reese et al, 2010).

Parents can cooperate with educators in supporting their child's learning by getting training on how to support their child at home. For example, when the child and his/ her parents spend time together while reading, the relationship between the child and the parents does not only improve, but also an appreciation for books and reading is developed by the child. It is therefore the parents who help the child to become interested in books.

The reading and writing behaviours of household members may influence the child's own literacy behaviours as children learn by imitation, by doing what they see adults do. In many instances, children who grow up in homes where neither of their parents have the ability to read means they probably do not have any access to books and therefore cannot strengthen their studies and learning. Even though the child attends a school where literacy is valued, it may seem difficult for the child to develop literate habits and an appreciation for reading and literacy.

Children's development needed for later success in school may be best supported by responsive parenting. This argument places the emphasis on empowering, inspiring and supporting parents with informal learning at home about how to support their child's literacy experience. With the support of parents and teachers as well as exposure to a literacy-rich

environment, children can successfully improve the language and build upon their literacy skills.

The case of Maboko contrasted with the arguments of Gee (1990). Gee argues that people who have not been born into a dominant discourse will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible to acquire such discourse. Gee also argues that discourses cannot be explicitly taught particularly in a classroom but can only be acquired by enculturation in the home or apprenticeship into social practices. However, the case of Maboko illustrates that in spite of the struggle involved in the process of learning a new language, appropriate support can allow for migrant students to succeed as much as any other.

The emergent literacy approach supports the view that literacy development starts long before formal childhood instruction (Prinsloo, 2005). Children's active participation in a print rich environment is a critical factor in learning literacy (Heath, 1983, 2001; Prinsloo, 2005; Torr, 2004). Children who come from a western-English speaking culture are exposed to literature and resources that further their development and contribute to their literacy development, as opposed to children who do not have access to these resources and come from other social practices. This furthers the gap that exists in ones understanding of literacy.

Poverty in Africa and more particularly in South Africa makes it very difficult if not impossible to apply the concept of emergent as well as learner-centred type teaching. It is therefore important to consider the conditions prevalent in Africa (South Africa) that has led to these conditions coming about, particularly focussing on the children's background. Emergent literacy emphasises that literacy attainment is strongly conditioned by cultural backgrounds (Heath, 2001; Prinsloo, 2005; Torr, 2004). Thus, children with different backgrounds may suffer from disadvantages when compared to children with great exposure to literacy from an early age. For instance, a middle-class learner who has attended a pre-school and grown up in a home environment where the family language is the same as the dominant school language has a large advantage over a working-class learner who enters into formal education at grade one class and speaks a different home language.

The disparity is partly attributed to the fact that in addition, middle-class learners may benefit greatly from the presence of books, magazines, recipes and computers in the home for children, along with an environment in which reading is done by parents for pleasure. This does not make up the whole difference in one sentence. These factors highlight the

importance of the reading-related behaviours of parents and the reading resources they are able to provide in the home, along with the power of socioeconomic background in shaping literacy practices.

In contrast, because of the challenges mentioned above, some homes are not able to provide the ideal cultural and linguistic background for their children. These families are primarily poor, black Africans who lack the Westernized background prioritised by the education system. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at a major disadvantage when they start school as many of them may not have their parents reading stories to them. Some children have less exposure to both the content of books and ways of learning than privileged children as they read the world differently. Their parents cannot get involved in the life of the school in order to provide support for them such as attending school meetings, and helping with their homework. English, as the dominant medium of education, also poses barriers to non-English speaking parents' involvement. Furthering this struggle, school system neglect to take into account the cultures of their learners, and struggle to value the different ways societies learn, such as through story-telling and rituals. By neglecting this, the students' development is stagnated, and when returning home, there is little help offered to the child, making it particularly difficult for children who are cut off from everyday life practices to further their education and development. Teachers can take into account that children interpret the same environment differently (Heath 1983).

My research shows despite the fact that Maboko comes from a non-English speaking background, she has adjusted well to English learning. This could be due to Maboko obtaining support from her mother who received training on how to support helping children learn at home. This signifies that inherently, parents, regardless of social and economic status are often able to nurture their child's development through non-conventional literacy activities. Their role in this regard may be limited as it often does not coincide with the school's education programme. During my fieldwork, I met some parents who said that they were willing to devote time in child-parent activities which improve literacy ability. They viewed education as a means by which their child can advance beyond the bounds of their current socio-economic status, but they often did not know how to proceed because they were not familiar with the expectations and demands of the school. Thus, increasing parents' verbal and maths through parent education programmes may enable them to support their

child's language and literacy development as they learn to navigate through the South African school system.

Maboko's case suggests that the language and literacy association, which begins prior to the time the child enters school, can be significantly improved once the child starts school, regardless of his or her literacy background. This requires great skill and competency on the part of the teacher, as well as passion and understanding for learners. A sense of responsibility and incentives to perform well academically needs to be encouraged in children and built throughout schools. These are very important factors that lead to better education levels among children in lower income families.

By translating SMS messages for her mother and helping her mother with English, according to her mother, Maboko's case suggests that if a child is incentivised to go to school and perform well, home setting and influences that are not conducive to a good education may not hamper the student's ability to read and write. A child's literacy can also be improved if teachers are able to identify and encourage positive attitudes in children. This allows them to increase their individual agency and personal initiative to learn from sources such as the books, magazines, online material, and more which a child can bring home and read alone. By reinforcing a child's responsiveness to literary stimuli and empowering them, children will be able to further these skills themselves, in school and through interacting with their peers. This is the reality of Maboko who first got support from her mother, and she is now the one helping her mother with literacy. This suggests that a child can still improve his or her reading ability regardless of the environment in which he or she comes from.

The teacher can offer support in these ways to help raise a child's reading level. In the same way the teacher can also use a child's home practices to increase their school literacy. Thus the implications are that the aspects of the home literacy environment which relate to the child's own involvement might be the key to improving early reading skills in children. In light of this, it can be argued that despite the influence of the socio-cultural backgrounds which children bring with them when they begin school, these influences might not completely determine a child's ultimate outcome, and great improvements can be made.

In conclusion it can be said that, in the field of language and literacy, regardless of the approach used to teach reading, appropriate support at school as well as at home is perhaps more critical to the reading success of a child. While I recognise that challenges exist and further research will need to be conducted to determine how this programme involving schools and parents should best be initiated, my paper has concluded that if these challenges can be overcome then this would prove to be the best, long-term initiative.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This research study was designed to answer the question:

How do Congolese migrant learners in primary school encounter language, literacy and learning in poor schools in Cape Town, with what kinds of implications for their schooling careers?

In doing so, I studied the learning experiences of three Congolese learners between the ages of 7 and 8 over a period of four weeks in a St Francis primary school.

In the chapter one I described my personal interest in this research study, and its context, as well as the aim and motivation behind the study itself.

In the chapter two I investigated the socio-cultural and learner-identity approaches that provide resources for the study of children from a minority language background's second language acquisition experiences. A social practice view believes that what is important about language is how it is used and that different language practices can be linked to cultural and societal values in different ways. Children learn language and literacy through everyday interaction, therefore language and literacy should be studied as it happens in social life. I also looked at the theoretical approaches to understanding language and literacy learning, such as reading theories, emergent literacy, as well as emergent biliteracy. I then briefly outlined the CAPS English First Additional Language Grades 1-3.

Chapter three described the research design and methodology as well as the data collection procedures I have used in this study.

Chapter four focused on the presentation and analysis of data in conversation with the theoretical perspectives that shaped this study.

In Chapter five I further engaged with the findings from my own research in relation to the theoretical perspectives I have developed in chapter two. Even though there is a struggle when learning a new language, the study indicated that the right levels of help for migrant students can aid them in being as successful as any other. This is one of the central

conclusions of this research: that the formal education practices of teaching languages is not guaranteed to develop literacy in a Congolese migrant learner – a change or improvement in the tutoring /teaching practices at school and parental involvement may possibly provide the necessary structure to ensure successful development of literacy among Congolese migrant learners. As the previous statement shows this conclusion is limited to three Congolese migrant learners. Therefore, though this study can help to some degree to better assess how to improve literacy levels of migrant children from the Congo, this research is limited and cannot therefore be seen as representative of all schools in Cape Town or all Congolese children in South Africa. It is a small scale study. Research was limited to the study of only three children for the first four weeks of the first term. It is therefore difficult for one to draw general conclusions based on a small, brief case study.

The approach toward literacy as a social practice combines both the individual's identity and practices. An observation of both learners in the classroom context as well as their home environment is necessary, however, in order to make sense of the sociocultural influences on literacy. However the study was limited to the classroom context alone. Furthermore, it might have been beneficial to include an observation of possible shifts in the tutoring practices at school throughout the year.

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Appendix A: Request for permission to conduct school-based research

Mr Joel Mbembi Mafandala
School of Education, UCT
Master's Candidate
Email: mbembijoel@yahoo.fr
Tel: 0829760175

The Western Cape Education Department
Attention: Dr Audrey Wyngaardt

26 November 2013

Re: School-based research -- Request for permission to conduct research on Literacy and language learning at St Agnes Primary School

Dear Dr Wyngaardt,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to introduce my study to you. My name is Joel Mafandala and I am conducting research for a Masters degree at the University of Cape Town. My dissertation aims to explore how Congolese migrant children encounter language, literacy and learning in a South African school. I aim to analyse their attitudes towards the English language in order to improve the facilitation of learning in a foreign language.

I would like to ask you, Dr Wyngaardt, for the permission to conduct my research at the St Agnes Primary School. The scheduling of my visits to the school will be organized according to the most convenient times for the school and will not disrupt the instructional program. With your permission, this research will take place during the first term of 2014 in February and will be conducted over a period of four weeks. My research will consist of classroom observations and interviews with learners and teachers regarding their attitudes toward the English language. Attached to this letter are the teacher and learner interview questions and a letter of support from my supervisor. I have also obtained formal consent from the principal of St. Agnes Primary School. The principal has confirmed this to me in writing, and we have agreed to meet in early January 2014 to finalise the arrangements for my research at the school.

I have formulated a consent form, which will be signed by the parents of the children participating in this research. Consent forms will also be given to the relevant teachers of the participating school children.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration in this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Joel Mafandala

Appendix B: Teacher's consent form

CONSENT FORM

Researcher Name: Joel Mafandala

Name of the University: University of Cape Town-Humanities Graduate School. South Africa.

Name of my institution: School of Education

Address: 248 Buitengracht, Cape Town

Phone: 0829760175

E-Mail: mbembijoel@yahoo.fr

Dear Teacher

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

I am a masters student at UCT and would like to request the voluntary, anonymous and confidential participation of your pupils at St Agnes Primary School as part of my research study.

The research looks at how Congolese migrant learners experience language, literacy and learning in a public school. The aim is to explore learners' attitudes towards the language of instruction. It also seeks to help facilitate their learning in a foreign language. I will observe students at regular intervals from February 2014 until March 2014. My aim is to observe ways teachers succeed in helping immigrant children – who come from a minority background and are being taught in a foreign language – to adjust and keep up with the work being covered in the classroom.

I will also make use of interviews as a form of collecting data. The interviews conducted with students and teachers will be recorded. I will use both audio and video recordings.

1. Video recording; the recorder will be placed in the classroom to fully capture students' interaction during the lesson. The purpose of the recording is to assess the verbal and non-verbal communication of students in their attitude towards the English language as medium of instruction in the classroom setting.

2. Voice recording one on one interviews will be conducted to record the students' experiences and challenges of communicating in the English language and their level of understanding English as a means of communication by educators.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met.

1. The real name of the school and participating students will not be used during data collection, or in the final written thesis. Pseudonyms will be used in all written work and verbal presentation.
2. If permission is granted for making audio and video recordings, these will not be used for any other purpose than for this research. At your request, these recordings will be erased.
3. The pupils' participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study without any penalty.

The information gathered during this research, will only be used to write my master's thesis. This thesis will only be read by my supervisor and external examiners, and will eventually be held in the university library.

Should you not ask what has been said, please ask questions for clarification.

The data will be used only when students consent to participate in the research. They must each sign on the block below.

Name	Yes	No
Do you grant permission for your pupils to be observed while teaching?		
Do you grant permission for your pupils to be audio and videotaped?		
Do you grant permission to use data elicited from your child during this research?		
Date		
Signature of respondent		

Joel Mafandala

Appendix C: Parent's consent form

CONSENT FORM

Researcher Name: Joel Mafandala

Name of the University: University of Cape Town-Humanities Graduate School. South Africa.

Name of my institution: School of Education

Address: 248 Buitengracht, Cape Town

Phone: 0829760175

E-Mail: mbembijoel@yahoo.fr

Dear Parent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

I am a masters student at UCT and would like to request the voluntary, anonymous and confidential participation of your child at St Agnes Primary School as part of my research study.

The research looks at how Congolese migrant learners experience language, literacy and learning in a poor school. The aim is to explore learners' attitudes towards the language of instruction. It also seeks to help facilitate their learning in a foreign language. I will observe learners at regular intervals from February 2014 until March 2014. My aim is to observe ways teachers succeed in helping immigrant children – who come from a minority background and are being taught in a foreign language – to adjust and keep up with the work being covered in the classroom.

I will also make use of interviews as a form of collecting data. The interviews conducted with students and teachers will be recorded. I will use both audio and video recordings.

3. Video recording; the recorder will be placed in the classroom to fully capture students' interaction during the lesson. The purpose of the recording is to assess the verbal and non-verbal communication of students in their attitude towards the English language as medium of instruction in the classroom setting.

4. Voice recording one on one interview will be conducted to record the students' experiences and challenges of communicating in the English language and their level of understanding English as a means of communication by educators.

I guarantee that the following conditions will be met.

4. The real name of the school and participating students will not be used during data collection, or in the final written thesis. Pseudonyms will be used in all written work and verbal presentation.
5. If permission is granted for making audio and video recordings, these will not be used for any other purpose than for this research. At your request, these recordings will be erased.
6. The pupils' participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study without any penalty.

The information gathered during this research, will only be used to write my master's thesis. This thesis will only be read by my supervisor and external examiners, and will eventually be held in the university library.

Should you not ask what has been said, please ask questions for clarification.

The data will be used only when students consent to participate in the research. They must each sign on the block below.

Name	Yes	No
Do you grant permission for your child to be observed while teaching?		
Do you grant permission for your child to be audio and videotaped?		
Do you grant permission to use data elicited from your child during this research?		
Date		
Signature of respondent		

Cher Parent

Objet : demande de participation au travail de recherche pour votre enfant

Je suis étudiant à UCT et en vue de l'obtention de mon diplôme de maîtrise en Science de l'éducation, il m'a été demandé de faire un travail de recherche sur l'expérience des élèves de l'école primaire du Congo en Afrique du Sud, dans le but de les aider à améliorer leur apprentissage dans la langue qui n'est certainement pas le Français or celle de leur origine. Pour ce, J'ai reçu la permission de la part du Directeur de l'école primaire St Agnès, Mr Louw de mener cette étude dans son école.

Par la présente, j'ai l'honneur de solliciter la participation de votre enfant pour ce travail de recherche qui consistera à observer et interviewer les élèves et leur enseignants pour la raison mentionnée ci-haut durant le mois de Février 2014.

Je certifie que la participation de votre enfant sera volontaire, anonyme, et confidentiel. Pour ce faire, toutes les mesures sont prises dans le but d'assurer le bon déroulement de l'enseignement pendant ce temps. Pour mener à bien ce travail, j'aurai besoin de faire usage de la caméras pour enregistrer toutes les informations nécessaire pouvant me permettre de rédiger ma thèse.

Sentez-vous à l'aise de poser la question si vous ressentez le besoin de plus d'explication. Votre signature sur ce tableau dessous sera la preuve de votre consentement ou non-consentement pour votre enfant de participer à ce travail de recherche.

Name	Oui	Non
Autorisez-vous que votre enfant soit observé pendant la leçon?		
Autorisez-vous que votre enfant soit interviewé?		
Autorisez-vous que l'on utilise les informations que donne votre enfant?		
Date		
Signature de participant		

Dans l'attente d'une suite favorable de votre part, je vous prie cher parent d'agréer l'expression de ma considération.

Joel Mafandala

Appendix D: Approval letter from WCDE for school-based research



Directorate: Research

Audrey.wyngaard2@pgwc.gov.za

tel: +27 021 467 9272

Fax: 0865902282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20131203-21792

ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mr Mbembi Joel Mafandala
248 Buitengracht
Cape Town
8001

Dear Mr Mbembi Joel Mafandala

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: HOW DO CONGOLESE MIGRANT LEARNERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENCOUNTER LANGUAGE LITERACY IN POOR SCHOOLS IN CAPE TOWN

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **03 February 2014 till 28 February 2014**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

Directorate: Research

DATE: 03 December 2013

Lower Parliament Street, Cape Town, 8001

tel: +27 21 467 9272 fax: 0865902282

33 22

Safe Schools: 0800 45 46 47

Private Bag X9114, Cape Town, 8000

Employment and salary enquiries: 0861 92

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